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**‘Home is Never Fully Achieved...Even When We Are In it’:  
Migration, Belonging and Social Exclusion within Punjabi  
Transnational Mobility**

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## **Abstract**

Drawing upon transnational research in the UK and India, primarily over 150 semi-structured interviews in Newcastle, UK and *Doaba*, Punjab, as well as the ‘mobilities turn’ within contemporary social science, this paper examines the pursuit of ‘home’ within a diasporic British Indian Punjabi community. It is argued that this transnational pursuit of home is significantly shaped by the dynamic social context of South Asia, in particular processes of social inclusion and exclusion therein. Thus, returning Punjabi migrant attempts to distinguish themselves from the resident population through conspicuous consumption, and simultaneous attempts from Punjabi residents to exclude Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) from ‘real’ Indian status, lead to a continual reprocessing of home across different sites of mobility, as well as demonstrating the ‘never fully achieved’ nature of home.

## **Keywords**

Mobility; Punjab; Diaspora; Home; Belonging; Transnationalism; Caste

## **Introduction**

Drawing upon transnational, ethnographic research, this paper examines meanings of 'home' within a diasporic and highly mobile British Indian Punjabi community. The region of Punjab was divided between India (East Punjab) and Pakistan (West Punjab) upon British partition prior to the political independence of both countries in 1947. We focus upon East Punjab which is situated in north west India and widely recognised (Ballard 2003; Singh and Tatla 2006) as a major outsource of South Asian migration to the UK over the past century. This small and predominantly rural area has witnessed dramatic and significant out migration, and subsequent intra-diasporic migration (Thandi 2010), across the world, for example, to Canada (Verma 2002), the USA (Leonard 1997), New Zealand (McLeod 1986), Australia (Voigt-Graf 2003) and East Africa (Bhachu 1985) to name only a few other destinations.

Recent estimates (Thandi 2010) as to the number of Eastern Punjabis overseas settle at around two million, meaning that this migrant group constitute at least ten percent of the global Indian diaspora from a region which contains only two percent of the Indian population. The overall economic and occupational success, within the metropolitan centres of the UK and other western nations, of a group of people who were originally small scale village peasant farmers has been remarkable (Ballard 2003). All existing studies of the global Eastern Punjabi village diaspora emphasise the strength of continuing links between this group, which includes those born and raised away from India, and the rural people and places of Indian Punjab, particularly through kinship ties.

The diasporic group under focus here can be seen as part of a wider ‘transnational community,’ the territory and people of contemporary East Punjab (hereafter referred to as Punjab/Punjabi) are embedded within multiple transnational relations. Previous research (e.g., Kessinger 1974; Helweg 1979; Bhachu 1985; Ballard 1994, 2003; Mooney 2006; Singh and Tatla 2006; Varghese and Rajan 2010) also unanimously demonstrates that it is a particular social (caste) group of Punjab, the *Jat Sikhs*, from a particular geographical area, the *Doaba* region<sup>ii</sup>, which has dominated migration to the UK. Consequently, this paper focuses upon one Jat Sikh community, resident within the north east of England and retaining links with Doaba. However, it is important to recognise that this social group are highly mobile, frequently travelling, communicating and exchanging between different sites in the UK, India and across the global Punjabi diaspora. Consequently, our focus, analysis and argument is directly framed by, and informs, the ‘mobilities turn’ (Hannam *et al.* 2006; Cresswell 2010) within contemporary social science. Drawing upon an interdisciplinary range of sources from across the social sciences, we investigate a far from sedentary or territorialised community and one of our main arguments is that the ongoing Punjabi mobility under focus in this paper is transforming ‘home...families, “local” communities, public and private spaces’ (Hannam *et al.* 2006: 2).

### **Conceptualising Diaspora and Locating Home within Mobility**

The concept of diaspora implies a ‘homing desire,’ a desire to feel at home in the context of migration (Brah 1996: 180), similarly enhanced mobility also has the search for

mooring inhered within it (Hannam *et al.* 2006). But ‘home’ has always been difficult to define, having numerous meanings with differing levels of abstraction. It is both ‘lived’ and ‘imagined’ (Clifford 1994; Brah 1996; Ahmed 2000; Ramji 2006; Herbert 2012) and constituted through multiple (lived and imagined) relationships with people and places (Mallett 2004; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Ghail and Haywood 2011). It has also been argued (Rapport and Dawson 1998; Mallett 2004; King and Christou 2011) that, in an era of intensifying global movement, home (or mooring) is an increasingly a-spatial phenomenon, a notion which is particularly relevant to the mobile global Punjabi diaspora being studied here. Simultaneously though, wherever it is located, home is often represented as offering complete familiarity and comfort, a place that we either leave and long for, or we move towards, for ontological security. This assumption has been usefully attacked (Brah 1996; Ahmed 2000; Fortier 2003; Mallett 2004; Wiles 2008; King and Christou 2011; Levitt *et al.* 2011; Herbert 2012), as it is clear that feelings of comfort and estrangement can be experienced concurrently within the same location, or in relation to the same location and events through different imaginings and memories. The diasporic *pursuit* of home entails human labour and can involve ‘physically or symbolically (re)constituting places which provide some kind of ontological security...”home” (is)...continually reprocessed...constituted by the *desire* for a “home”, rather than surfacing from an already constituted home...home is never fully achieved, never fully arrived-at, even when we are in it’ (Fortier 2003: 115-31, original emphasis).

It is the ongoing, transnational (re)processing of home within Punjabi mobility that we focus upon in this paper. In doing so, we need to recognise that meanings of home are

shaped by the dynamic, social, cultural and political contexts within which they are (re)processed. In particular, they can be ‘intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of (social) inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances’ (Brah 1996: 192). Too often, home is represented as an isolated space, disconnected from wider social contexts. Whilst previous studies of South Asian-UK migration, including those which focus specifically upon Punjabi-UK migration (e.g., Bhachu 1985; Brah 1996; Ballard 1994, 2003; Hall. 2002; Singh and Tatla 2006; Thandi 2010), and wider discussions around the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism (e.g., Gilroy 1993; Clifford 1994; Vertovec 1999) do powerfully illustrate that diasporic meanings of home and belonging, as an aspect of diasporic mobility and identity, are continually ‘in process’ (Hall 1990), our central argument here is that the majority of existing studies of South Asian diasporic identities, despite some notable exceptions (e.g., Gardner 1995; Osella and Osella 2000; Ramji 2006; Mand 2010; Erdal 2012), focus too heavily upon dynamic processes of intra-diasporic identity formation within western societies, neglecting equally important *dynamic* processes of identity formation within South Asia, the original outsource of migration and an increasingly significant site of South Asian mobility. The influence of South Asia upon diasporic meanings of home is considered highly significant by previous studies. However, this influence is not analysed in detail and is represented as static and unchanging. Using our study of one Punjabi transnational mobile group as an illustration, we contend that the British Asian diasporic pursuit of home, as an aspect of British Asian diasporic mobility and identity, is significantly shaped by the dynamic social context of South Asia as well as social processes within Britain and across the global Punjabi (and

South Asian) diaspora. In particular, we argue that increasing divisions between the UK diasporic group studied and the non migrant permanent residents of Punjab, which are intrinsically related to processes of inclusion and exclusion and the rapidly changing social context of Punjab, and in turn connected to the increasing influence of global consumer culture within India, significantly shapes contemporary meanings, and the reprocessing, of home amongst the Punjabi diaspora. As Skeggs (2004) and Hannam *et al* (2006) point out, mobility is not a resource to which everyone has an equal relationship. The Punjabi mobility under focus in this paper both shapes and is shaped by power relations, which in turn influence Punjabi diasporic meanings of home and belonging.

### **Caste and *Izzat* within Punjabi Society**

Punjabi caste, which can be defined as ‘a non-localized endogamous unit’ (Kessinger 1974: 35), is one mark of identity within Punjabi society and it is according to this that individuals are assigned high or low status. Caste distinctions within India and Punjab have been, and still are, related to the most extreme forms of exploitation, humiliation, and poverty. However, manifestations of caste have always varied widely in different Indian regions. East Punjab is now a Sikh majority state of twenty four million people. Within rural districts, Sikhs constitute between seventy and ninety percent of the population (Jodhka 2002; Ram 2012), and it is estimated that around sixty percent of these Sikhs belong to the Jat caste (Puri 2003; Ram 2007, 2012). With a higher proportion (thirty percent) of Scheduled (lowest) Castes (SCs or *Dalits*) among the Punjabi population than in any other Indian state and a particular concentration of these



groups within the Doaba region (Ram 2007, 2012), the rural villages under scrutiny in this paper are predominantly Sikh, Dalit and Jat.<sup>iii</sup> Despite an explicit opposition to caste differentiation within the scriptures and spiritual teaching of Sikhism, caste inequalities and social exclusion on the basis of caste are still significant features of the lived reality of contemporary Indian Punjab (Jodhka 2002, 2009; Puri 2003; Ram 2007, 2012; Judge and Bal 2008), and there remains a strong correlation between caste and class within the state. Jat Sikhs are the most economically powerful, politically/socially influential and occupationally privileged group within Punjab and the ‘dominant caste’ (Jodhka 2002; Puri 2003), owning over eighty percent of available agricultural land (Jodhka 2004; Ram 2012). The Punjabi Dalit population is greater in number, but their share of land ownership lower, than in any other Indian state, meaning that Jats and Dalits ‘live in extreme contrast of affluence and deprivation’ (Ram 2007: 4068).

The relative wealth of the Jat Sikh caste group has partly enabled them to mobilise the resources necessary to dominate migration from Punjab to western societies, including the UK (Helweg 1979; Ballard 1994; Taylor *et al.* 2007)<sup>iv</sup>, a dominance which has also been facilitated by the maintenance of intra-caste endogamy across the Punjabi transnational community (Walton-Roberts 2004; Ram 2007; Judge and Bal 2008). Largely rural, village based kinship and caste networks have also been crucial to the development of Jat Sikh transnational migration over the past century by providing information about opportunities abroad, communal financial support, support networks for new migrants within a foreign land and a mechanism for attending to responsibilities (e.g., land, families and businesses) left behind by migrants (Kessinger 1974; Helweg

1979; Verma 2002; Singh and Tatla 2006; Taylor *et al.* 2007). These previous studies have also shown that the Punjabi concept of *izzat* (honour/prestige) is central to understanding caste identity, caste relations and an attachment amongst migrants to Punjab as home even when they are permanently resident overseas. The maintenance and enhancement of *izzat* within Punjab is a prime factor in the decisions and motivations of Punjabi migrants, with individual behaviour shaping and reflecting the *izzat* of the family, kinship group and caste to which one belongs. Jat Sikhs have an historical reputation as expert farmers and indomitable peasant proprietors, with their ownership and cultivation of land through ‘hard’ manual labour being markers of high *izzat* and attracting high economic returns for much of the twentieth century. Overseas migration, which as we have seen has been dominated by Jat Sikhs from Punjab, has more recently grown in importance, displacing agricultural prowess, as an indicator of high *izzat* within Punjabi society (Singh and Tatla 2006; Taylor *et al.* 2007; Varghese and Rajan 2010). We will be arguing that Indian land ownership is still central to contemporary Jat Sikh *izzat* and caste dominance within Punjab and the global Punjabi diaspora, but that high *izzat* no longer primarily derives from the ownership and control of agricultural land and produce, but is asserted by the use of land for consumer display which is part of, and has implications for, a significant reprocessing of home amongst the mobile diaspora studied.

### **Jat Sikh Migration and Meanings of Home**

Jat Sikh Punjabi out-migration, including to the UK, has a long history stretching over the past two centuries. However, it is really from 1947, a time of immense upheaval and

bloodshed related to the British partition of Punjab, to the present day when we have witnessed significant Jat Sikh migration to the UK, as well as to the US, Canada and Australia. Previous studies of significant Jat Sikh migration to the UK (Helweg 1979; Ballard 1994), Canada (Verma 2002) and the US (Lessinger 2003) demonstrate that such movement was originally viewed, by migrants themselves and their family and kin residing in India, as a predominantly male sojourn for the accumulation of wealth and the maintenance or enhancement of izzat *within Punjab*, particularly via the expansion of agricultural land ownership. International Jat Sikh migration was driven by (lived and imagined) meanings of home firmly anchored within India, despite the ‘lived experience of locality’ (Brah 1996: 192), for individual migrants, also being partly outside the territory. Existing research has also illustrated that as many of these sojourners became permanent UK settlers from the 1960s onwards, and were joined by wives, children and family members, meanings of home became more complex and multifaceted. For example, it is widely reported (Helweg 1979; Bhachu 1985; Ballard 1994, 2003) that financial remittances to India inevitably declined as migrants settled, were joined by family and often purchased a private UK property. Nevertheless, the simultaneous maintenance of Punjabi property (Helweg 1979; Ballard 1994), frequent travel between the UK and India (Ballard 2003), information technology aided interaction with Indian kin and Indian diasporic kin across the world (Vertovec 2004; Thandi 2010), as well as continued orientation to the social and cultural (especially caste) relations of Punjab (Ballard 1994; Taylor *et al.* 2007) suggests highly mobile, multiple and transnational Jat Sikh relations with, and attachments to, people, places and imagined homes.

It is within the context of multiple attachments to multiple homes, with a particular focus upon second and third (British born) generations, that previous authors have explored South Asian diasporic identities. This is a discussion to which this paper contributes. As suggested above, the emphasis in relation to the Punjabi diaspora has hitherto been upon the relationship between dynamic social processes within the UK and perceptions of home and belonging. For example, Bhachu (1985) and Brah (1996) examine relationships between socio-economic change in the UK during the 1980s (especially recession and rising unemployment), individual and institutionalised racism in the UK and the cultural identities of British Asians. Hall (2002) examines the relationship between postcolonial politics in the UK during the 1990s and identity formation amongst British Sikh youth. Burdsey (2006) discusses the relationship between national sporting allegiances and ‘new’, young British Asian identities. He argues that the lack of a ‘myth of return’ amongst this young generation, combined with their lived experience of Britain, means that their widespread support for the England football team is an arena where their permanency of settlement, British citizenship and UK home can be emphasised. Ashutosh (2012) uses narratives of South Asians in Toronto to investigate the ways in which the city is involved in the production of diasporic identities. The influence of South Asia upon diasporic identities is considered as highly significant by all of these studies, for example support for a cricket team rather than a football team from the sub-continent amongst the young people in Burdsey’s study is seen as evidence of them simultaneously emphasizing ‘their ethnicities’, while the connections between South Asia and Toronto are important to the production of identities for Ashutosh. However, the South Asian social processes involved here are not analysed in any detail and they are

represented as static and unchanging. We wish to add to the existing literature by extending the context within which British South Asian meanings of home and diasporic identities are analysed, to include dynamic social and cultural processes within South Asia. If diasporic identities are inherently transnational and mobile, we require mobile, transnational research to investigate them. However, despite an explosion in the field of transnational and mobility studies, much contemporary social science research displays a northern bias. This paper is based upon a transnational, empirical research project.

### **The Research Process**

This paper is based upon ethnographic research, primarily semi-structured interviewing and nonparticipant observation. We conducted fifty eight interviews within the Jat Sikh community of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, UK and ninety seven interviews in the Doaba region of Punjab, India between 2004 and 2010. Those selected for interview were representative in terms of gender and age. Four particular villages were chosen as research sites within Doaba. These were the villages where our Newcastle respondents, or their parents, originated from. Thus, our first interviews in India (thirty seven in total) were with kin of the Newcastle sample. Our research was then widened out across the caste hierarchy to capture the relationship between the diaspora and all those within the villages chosen. Our interviews were representative of the age, gender and caste make-up of each village. We observed relationships within the UK community through attendance at social gatherings within the local *Gudwara* and a regional Punjabi community centre, as well as interviewing within people's homes. In Punjab, we observed daily village life

through guided tours of each village, eating and overnight stays with a representative range of families in each village and through attendance at local ceremonies.

### **From Sojourners to Multiple Homemakers**

The majority of first generation migrants in our study arrived in the UK during the 1950s and 60s, with a perception that their migration would maintain or increase the izzat of the immediate family and simultaneously the izzat of the wider kinship and Jat Sikh caste group. Initially, when these single male migrants viewed themselves as sojourners to the UK, the aim was to utilise money earned in the UK to buy land and increase family holdings in Punjab – a lived and imagined Indian home. For example, some respondents recounted how partition meant giving up the ownership of land in West Punjab to move to the East and work as a farmer on someone else's land. 'There was little money and the agricultural work was hard work...without land there was little security' (UK Jat Sikh, 69 year old male). There were families within this man's kinship group where males had moved to the UK and told of the opportunities of very high and stable earnings. He decided that migration to the UK (in 1956) 'would be a better way to find security and stability for my family.' The money required for his original passage was raised by his wife's family. As all of our first generation respondents became permanent settlers in the UK, a priority was to accumulate sufficient money to ensure the migration to, and settlement in, the UK of the immediate family (spouse and children). Most commonly, the trigger for this family migration was the purchase of a private UK house.

Although the volume of financial remittance to India declined as UK settlement became permanent for those in our sample, it certainly did not disappear. Furthermore, the maintenance of land holdings in Punjab and continual communication with Punjabi relatives, kin and friends in India and across the globe were universal throughout our cross generational UK research respondents. The majority of our sample currently visit Punjab at least once every two years. For many, annual stays of two months or more by first generation migrants and their British born daughters and sons are common. We can attribute multiple mobile relationships with, and attachments to, people, places and imagined homes within the UK, India and many other sites around the world amongst the Jat Sikh diasporic group studied here, illustrative of an a-spatial transnational, highly mobile Punjabi village community in the context of large scale, widespread and long running international migration patterns. We argue that the nature of these multifaceted relationships and attachments, constituting a diasporic pursuit of home, are dynamic and continually reprocessed. Crucially, we want to suggest that this reprocessing is influenced by the social context of, and especially processes of inclusion and exclusion within, Punjab as well as the UK and other 'host' nations.

### **Diaspora Spaces in Punjab**

There is still a commitment to owning land in Punjab amongst the UK Jat Sikhs studied, with the majority maintaining holdings since the migration of themselves or previous generations. However, this land is no longer primarily used for traditional Jat agriculture but most often to build very large, palatial Indian family homes, a process also noted and

investigated in relation to Pakistani Punjab by Erdal (2012). The landscape of rural Punjab is now punctuated, and in some areas of Doaba dominated, by huge brick, and often marble, built NRI (Non Resident Indian) houses. Some of these are built on the site of an original or existing family farm, others on newly purchased land. Such sites constitute what Brah (1996: 208-9) terms 'diaspora spaces' within Punjab, points 'at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion...of "us" and "them", are contested.' Firstly, the NRI houses illustrate an enduring attachment to people, places and an imagined home within India, as our diasporic respondents universally spoke of the importance of retaining a home within Punjab and that this land should never be sold. 'Our house in India is on our family land and we will keep it always to pass to our children and on to our grandchildren. Our family have always worked the land there, it is part of us and we will never see it sold. I would never leave India again if I thought this was going to happen, it is too important to me' (UK Jat Sikh, 55 year old male).

Very few of our second and third generation UK Jat Sikhs expressed any intention to dispense with family land or buildings in India. In fact, the majority stressed the importance of maintaining a tangible connection with the people and places of Punjab, their Indian 'roots', for the benefit of their own children and grandchildren. Drawing upon Tolia-Kelly's (2004) analysis of material cultures within British Asian UK houses, we see here how material possessions (Punjabi land and buildings) signify enfranchisement to a particular heritage, home and identity (Indian Jat Sikh Punjabi). Certainly, there was a widespread recognition – part of a 'collective, visual vocabulary' (Tolia-Kelly 2004, 319) - amongst our entire sample (NRI and Indian) that a physical,



and most often very ostentatious, home in Punjab is crucial for migrants to (symbolically) illustrate their continuing commitment to their Punjabi heritage, as well as expressing the continuing dominance of the Jat Sikh caste within Doaba (Taylor *et al.* 2007). Thus, one of our SC Punjabi respondents argued that NRI Jat Sikh consumer displays in Punjab (e.g., the building of large, ostentatious houses) are ‘what makes them Jats...we are so far away from them...everyone wants what they’ve got but we can never get it, we never travel away from Punjab’ (Scheduled Caste Punjabi, 32 year old male). However, we want to simultaneously argue that the building of large Doaban family houses by our UK sample, the physical and symbolic reconstitution of space within Punjab, also asserts the ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu 1984) and high izzat of specifically *NRI* Jat Sikhs, relative to the resident Doaba population and including among them Doaban Jat Sikhs. A search for ontological security in the context of migration (the pursuit of home), through the symbolic reconstitution of space by building NRI houses within Punjab, exacerbates and produces boundaries of social exclusion as well as inclusion.

Some of the NRI houses have as many as sixteen bedrooms and a matching number of bathrooms, and they are often surrounded by large 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 which are frequently shaped in the image of a particular symbol to indicate that the owner is an NRI. Such symbols include aeroplanes, eagles and footballs. **PLEASE INSERT ATTACHED PHOTOGRAPH HERE.** Both the outside and interior of the UK NRI houses which we visited in Punjab are decorated in a luxurious, western style, with

furniture and decorations, such as leather sofas, very large flat screen televisions and framed pictures of western cities and views often imported from the UK. Many of these products and brands are widely available in Punjab and India, but our UK and Indian respondents continually emphasised the importance of the UK origin of those displayed within the NRI homes we visited. Guests to these NRI houses were often served popular western snacks and drinks, such as biscuits from the famous UK department store *Marks and Spencer* and brands of Scottish whisky. We can suggest a reversal of the process described by Tolia-Kelly (2004) where she examines possessions and artefacts in the British Asian home as signifiers of belonging, geographically and socially, to a particular (e.g., East African Asian) community, and of opposition to exclusion within wider British society. The NRI houses described above are signifiers of belonging to, and inclusion within, not only Punjab as a region and India as a nation but also the NRI community in Punjab/India and the global Punjabi village diaspora/transnational community. As we shall see below, we can also assert that these houses are signifiers of exclusion from the resident Doaban/Punjabi population.

It is common for the NRI houses to stand empty for the majority of the year, only in use when the owners visit. They are an omnipresent symbol and reminder to Indian (Jat and non Jat) residents of NRI distinctiveness and wealth, the former being effectively excluded from a world in which the latter are included. We should note here that we have also recently witnessed the development of some similar forms of consumer display (e.g., the building of large, ostentatious houses) amongst non migrants, and amongst some non Jats, within Punjab. This phenomenon has been partly inspired by the diasporic

conspicuous consumption and pursuit of home, and the changing social and economic context within Punjab (see below), which are the very foci of this paper. However, our data suggests that non migrant consumer displays have been met by NRI attempts to further distinguish themselves from the resident Doaban population. As one Punjabi Jat Sikh put it, ‘many richer people here (in Punjab) have started to build same type large houses...with their own water tanks on the top...and big televisions and American-style fridges and things...the NRIs don’t like it if there is some of these next to them in their village...they then build a bigger one with even more things in it...they are always trying to show us what they have achieved over there...we are becoming further and further divided as a community’ (42 year old male).

Our Punjabi respondents, and some within our UK sample, also suggested that there was intra-NRI competition for status through conspicuous consumption, ongoing attempts to ‘outdo’ each other through the development of ever more ostentatious houses in Punjab. However, our focus in this paper is principally upon the way that NRI consumerism in general is received and perceived by our Indian Punjabi respondents, and the implications that this has for the diasporic Punjabi pursuit of home and belonging. Interestingly, the UK homes of the majority of NRIs in our study were decorated to emphasise more strongly their belonging to Sikh, Punjabi and Indian communities, as opposed to their NRI status. The artefacts and possessions on display in these homes, such as carpets, rugs, pictures, crockery, ornaments and religious symbols, were much more likely to signify the Sikh, Punjabi and Indian roots of our respondents. The search for ontological security in the context of migration, the pursuit of home, occurs transnationally and

through mobility, both 'here' and 'there' (Fortier 2003; Mallett 2004; Hannam *et al.* 2006; Mand 2010; King and Christou 2011) and is intrinsically linked to processes of inclusion and exclusion 'here' and 'there' (Brah 1996; Hannam *et al.* 2006; Ghail and Haywood 2011).

We encountered intense criticism from our Indian respondents of the NRI buildings within their midst. 'We are annoyed by the NRI houses...they are an insult, people in the same village do not have enough sanitation' (Jat Sikh Punjabi 42 year old male). Our Indian participants also described other ways in which NRIs 'flouted' their wealth which was, from their perception, an attempt to emphasise their distinction and superior status (izzat) from the permanent residents of Doaba:

They (NRIs) hire big cars and have very nice clothes and mobile phones and computers...here we see the wealth, they show us it, of course we want it. We are very poor here and live in unhygienic homes, lots of flies, lots of poverty, of course especially the young people they want to move to the UK and live a rich life...they buy many things in India to take home because they are cheaper to them. Large amounts of clothes that we could never dream to buy. It is a sign of their wealth. We see this. (Jat Sikh Punjabi 19 year old male).

They (NRIs) look down on the village when they come back...speaking frankly, there is jealousy, and even hatred, on both sides. They (NRIs) cause great disruption to local life and we are belittled by their presence (SC Punjabi, 39 year old male).

The UK Jat Sikhs in our sample are seen by Indian Jat and non Jat residents, and see themselves, as a distinct and privileged social group. Other studies of South Asian migration, for example from Bangladesh (Gardner 1995), Pakistan (Ballard 2004; Erdal 2012), and Indian Gujarat (Ramji 2006) to the UK, and from Kerala, South India to the middle east (Osella and Osella 2000), reveal similar attempts to assert diasporic wealth, superiority and status through consumption practices within South Asia. These studies, and our own data, suggest that the meaning of home amongst diasporic groups can be significantly reprocessed as such groups become permanently settled in a primary lived home away from the outsource of migration and simultaneously exhibit their inclusion in a life (of conspicuous consumption) from which many remaining residents are excluded. Nevertheless, the very attempt by the contemporary Jat Sikhs under scrutiny to use their Punjabi lived home to assert distinctiveness within Punjab via consumer displays does simultaneously suggests a continued attachment to the people, places, and imagined home of Punjab. However, the nature of this attachment is continually reprocessed in the context of mobile social processes within South Asia, the UK, and across the global diaspora. We are particularly stressing the importance of the social and cultural context in South Asia, and relations of inclusion and exclusion therein, as we feel these have been neglected to date. We now turn to consider the changing, dynamic social context of Punjab in more detail.

### **Changing Punjab**

The mobile pursuit of home amongst the Jat Sikh diaspora studied does not occur within a social vacuum. Neither is it influenced by social processes within one nation. As we have already rehearsed, previous authors have concentrated upon the relationship between UK processes, South Asian diasporic identities, and multiple attachments to home. We emphasize the equal importance of the changing social, cultural and economic context of Punjab, and processes of inclusion and exclusion therein, for the meanings of home reported above.

We have argued elsewhere (Taylor *et al.* 2007) and suggest above that caste relations, and more specifically the routes to high izzat, within Punjabi society have changed significantly in recent years. The demonstration effect of NRI wealth and status and the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (in/from conspicuous consumption and ‘a rich life’) it produces alongside the general intrusion of global consumer culture within Punjab and India (Singh and Tatla 2006) and the positive ideological projection of the west through the global mass media (Lessinger 2003) is intensifying the desire of Indian Punjabis to migrate to western societies and be included in a world they feel they are excluded from. We found this desire to be widespread amongst our Doaba sample.

Western migration has certainly displaced the ownership of agricultural land and agricultural prowess within India as the route to high izzat. As one of our respondents (a Punjabi Jat Sikh, 39 year old male) explains, ‘all of our younger generation want to go, it makes it very difficult for us to manage our lives, to be parents to our children and to manage their dreams and aspirations realistically, and to maintain traditions and family life here. Everyone wants to go...given a chance, we would all go.’

In common with Walton-Roberts (2004) and Mooney (2006), we found that the nurturing, maintenance and development of NRI connections and communications was a priority above all other ambitions, and certainly above the nurturing of agricultural land, for the Indian families researched. The priority of *all* our parental Jat Sikh respondents within Doaba was to arrange the marriage of their children to NRI families, thereby apparently ensuring high izzat for the family. These changing caste relations and cultural identities, in turn, further reinforce the changing meanings of the Punjabi home amongst the Jat Sikh diaspora studied, from a site for the development and expression of agricultural strength to a material and cultural space for the consumer display of wealth and status (izzat). This social context also reinforces the importance of displaying inclusion in the latter as an element of diasporic (NRI) belonging and identity.

When analysing the recent restructuring of rural Punjabi social, cultural and caste relations, and the implications this has for the Jat Sikh diasporic pursuit of home, it is crucial to discuss the impact of capitalist globalisation upon the Punjab economy, in particular the increasing neo-liberalisation and capitalisation of the agricultural sector. 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 (Ram 2007, 2012),

with much agricultural labour now performed by the lowest social castes (Taylor and Singh 2009). ‘Bonded labour’ is illegal but widely evident within contemporary Punjabi agriculture (Kaur 2005; Taylor and Singh 2009) and inherent to capitalist globalisation (Brass 2008). There have been numerous reports of Jat Sikh Punjabi farmers, suffering from huge and rising debts, collectively putting entire Punjabi villages up for sale which would have been unheard of even a decade ago. We have also witnessed dramatically rising levels of farmer suicides, attributed to debt, within the state. Again, this intensifies the desire to achieve and display NRI status for the maintenance of izzat and caste dominance. As we have contended throughout, it is clear that the ownership and control of agricultural land and its cultivation is no longer seen as a marker of Jat Sikh identity and high izzat within Punjab, and that this has significant implications for the pursuit of home amongst the Jat Sikh diaspora, manifested as it is now in Punjab through consumer display rather than agricultural investment and prowess. The (above reported) changing social, cultural and economic context of Punjab is crucial for a full understanding of dynamic cultural identities and meanings of home amongst the Punjabi transnational community.

### **Reprocessing Punjab**

We suggest above that one of the ways in which transnational attachments to multiple homes is illustrated by UK Jat Sikhs is through regular visits to Punjabi villages. We argue here that these experiences, a lived home in India, also significantly shape the meaning and pursuit of home for the diasporic group studied, once again illustrating the



importance of considering dynamic social processes in South Asia as factors in the production of South Asian meanings of home and diasporic identities.

Many of the first generation UK migrants in our sample articulated a longing for an imagined home, especially in terms of kinship relations, which they felt was deficient within their 'isolated' UK experience. The views of the following woman who migrated to the UK in 1963 to join her husband were representative (across genders) of our sample. 'I got a shock when I arrived in England...I still find it hard...one of my brothers came over for six months, he couldn't stand it, he said everyone was always working, life is too hard, the weather is too cold, no-one ever sees anyone and everyone is too isolated, he went back, he called the UK a "prison of choice"...you leave the freedom of movement and the socializing of India to come to the UK, work all hours and live in small houses' (UK Jat Sikh 66 year old female).

Our first generation migrants experience this isolationism most strongly when they stop working. Many of their children have followed the western path of departing the family abode for educational or vocational opportunities, leaving an elderly couple or single person alone, isolated and longing for the support and interaction which our respondents argue used to be offered by the wider kinship group and Punjabi village life. Whether such relations actually existed or not can be questioned, as it is common for images of home, particularly an imagined home geographically absent from the lived home of a diaspora (Ramji 2006; King and Christou 2011), to be 'poeticised' (Steedman 1999). However, it is clear that the global outmigration to which the Jat Sikh diaspora have themselves contributed has partly changed rural Punjabi life beyond the recognition and

desire, poetic or not, of some first generation migrants. Certainly, when revisiting India, the Punjabi imagined home desired in the UK (as above) is seen as having disappeared.

As one UK NRI, while visiting ‘his village’, explained:

I was born here (Punjab), I have family here and land here so I have ties here and I should feel more at home here but my family are in England and so I have stronger ties there now, and many of my family are not in India any more. But our culture should be here not in England, I feel that... When we left India (in 1989), there were a lot of people left in our village, forty families, now there are only fourteen families. There have been a lot of changes here. Old ties are breaking down. For example, a wedding here, the whole village would be involved, milk would be collected from the whole village to go to help with wedding food and financial help would be given from the whole village and furniture and cooking pots shared, but this doesn't happen now, it's all breaking down (UK Jat Sikh 53 year old male).

The wedding referred to was organised by the brother of the above respondent, as his NRI son was marrying a Punjabi resident. However, because the wider village population refused to help finance, organize or, in many cases, even attend the wedding, the ceremony became an NRI event. As suggested earlier by the widespread Doaban criticism of NRI attempts to assert high izzat through consumer displays within Punjab, our UK diaspora are not always afforded the status which they assert, *outside of the NRI community*, within India. Consumer displays within Punjab are highly valued within the NRI community of Punjab, as illustrated by the continual attempts to ‘outdo’ each other through ostentatious house building and decoration. However, this pursuit of izzat and home within Doaba is simultaneously excluding NRIs from the (changing) village life and culture of Doaban residents. The lived Punjabi home within which Jat Sikh NRIs are

embedded increasingly involves interaction with other NRIs, thus challenging and deflating the image (articulated within the UK rather than India) of an imagined Punjabi home constituted by wide ranging and reciprocal village relationships.

However, the pursuit of home is context dependent and ongoing (Brah 1996; Fortier 2003; Mallet 2004; Wiles 2008; Mand 2010), and the longing for an imagined Punjabi home, constituted by reciprocal and harmonious village relations, was still articulated by many of our Jat Sikh diasporic respondents when interviewed within the context of their UK lived home. This pursuit is also illustrated by the enhanced ‘Punjabiness’ of the UK lived home, in terms of artefacts, possessions and decoration therein, relative to the more ‘westernized’ NRI lived home in Doaba.

When confronted with the realities of contemporary Punjabi life through their Indian lived home, many first generation migrants were very disparaging and attempted to further assert the distinction between themselves and Doaban residents, including kin and other Jat Sikhs. Our diasporic respondents often identified most strongly with their UK lived home when relating their experiences of revisiting India, again challenging the images of an imagined Punjabi home with the lived experience of home in India:

I couldn’t move back (to India) because you see it is a third world country. They don’t have the amenities we (in the UK) have (UK Jat Sikh 64 year old female);

I can’t stand to see the rubbish and the lack of hygiene in India. It is a beautiful country but people don’t keep it clean...I get done, I get ripped off because they know from how I look and speak I am not from India any more...they are so good at cheating you, I am helpless like a little baby ...I don’t know anything now about India. It changes so much

every year...I go to India for a holiday but it is nice to come back (UK Jat Sikh 66 year old female).

The majority of our second and third generation UK respondents did want to continue Doaban links and visited India alongside first generation migrants. This younger generation were also active in the consumer displays (pursuit of home) reported above. However, they were also aware, from their lived experience of visiting Punjab, that their NRI status distinguished them from the local population. For example, there was a recognition amongst all of our respondents that British born Punjabis were treated as foreign tourists in India:

They crack me up people here (Punjab), they're always on the make and they are so sharp, so sharp...I can't get anything at the local price. Even if it's a packet of fags and I send my cousin (Punjab resident), they know that he doesn't smoke that brand in the shop so they know it's for you and they stick the price on and bung you up, you can't get away with it. Even when I went to the Taj Mahal and they have this one price for Indians and one for foreign tourists...the guy on the gate clocked me. He said 'where are you from ?.' I said 'India.' He said 'which state ?.' I said 'Punjab.' Then he said 'who is the governor of Punjab ?' and of course I didn't have a clue and I had to pay the full tourist price, he stiched me up (UK Jat Sikh, male, 28 years old).

They get ripped off because people know they are not from here...the police bother the NRIs more because they know they have money...The NRIs are targeted...we don't call them Non-Resident Indians, we call them Not Really Indian (Punjabi Non-Jat Sikh male 25 years old).

When articulating experiences of their Punjabi lived home, our British born respondents emphasised their relationships and identification with other NRIs in India rather than the resident population, even their own family and kin members. Processes of inclusion and exclusion (inclusion in NRI consumption practices, exclusion from ‘real’ Indian status), which are intrinsically related to the dynamic economic, social and cultural context of Punjab outlined above, are significantly shaping the meaning of home and diasporic identities of the UK born South Asians studied. The process of exclusion from local status actually led many of our respondents to more strongly emphasize their UK citizenship and an imagined UK home when in Punjab. This phenomenon was not necessarily transferred across national boundaries but that does not mean that we should deny the significance of South Asian experiences and processes for understanding the pursuit of home and diasporic identity.

## **Conclusions**

The meaning of home, for human beings, is far too often fetishised (Fortier 2003), as a place of complete familiarity and comfort divorced from the social, economic and cultural context in which it is continually (re)produced. Through an analysis of a highly mobile Punjabi transnational community, we have demonstrated that home is continually *pursued*, reprocessed on an ongoing basis through human labour and mobility, with resulting experiences that can simultaneously offer comfort and estrangement, inclusion and exclusion. There is a long and continuing history, and deeply embedded cultural tradition, of significant and wide ranging global emigration from rural Punjab, India, with

the UK historically being the most favoured destination. In a recent study of Sikhs in Britain, Singh and Tatla (2006: 41) argue that Punjabi Sikhs 'are, in many ways, the premier migrants of South Asia.' We have examined the transnational pursuit of home, and the processes which shape and impinge upon it, amongst one group of these migrants, Jat Sikhs based in the north east of England who retain links with the Doaba region of Punjab and who are part of a global Punjabi village diaspora. We recognise that our analysis is necessarily partial. Firstly, it is based upon a study of *one* UK Jat Sikh diasporic group. Secondly, migrant meanings of home and belonging have 'a myriad of sources' (Ramji 2006: 648) and we could not hope to discuss them all. Our central argument is that the dynamic, ever changing social, economic and cultural context of Punjab is important, alongside dynamic processes in the UK and across the global village diaspora, in shaping the pursuit of home amongst Jat Sikh Punjabis. Previous studies of Punjabi and South Asian diasporic meanings of home and diasporic identities have focussed primarily upon western and intra-diasporic processes in the (re)production of meanings of home, to the relative neglect of dynamic processes in South Asia. Where the South Asian context has been considered significant, it has been represented as static and unchanging. We make a contribution to the literature here which redresses the balance. It is only through transnational empirical research, within both India and the UK, that we have been able to do this. Our arguments may have relevance for analyses of the relationship between migration and home more generally (i.e., beyond South Asian migration), and studies of the pursuit of home more generally as movement, migration and mobility become ever more central to the contemporary human condition (Rapport and Dawson 1998; Hannam *et al.* 2006; Cresswell 2010).

Our analysis of the relationship between the changing social, economic and cultural context of Punjab and the Punjabi diasporic pursuit of home reveals the particular significance of processes of social inclusion and exclusion, in turn related to the impact of global consumer culture, within Punjab. Jat Sikhs are currently the dominant caste of Punjab and have been for the past century. This caste dominance in Punjab, and high izzat, was formerly maintained and expressed through agricultural land ownership and agricultural prowess. However, as agricultural land and labour in Punjab has rapidly declined in value and status, related to the impact of capitalist globalisation and neo-liberalisation within the region, overseas migration (for e.g., to the UK) has now displaced agricultural prowess as the route to high izzat and caste dominance for Jat Sikhs within Punjab. Consequently, although we can note a continuing attachment to a lived and imagined home within Doaba amongst the Jat Sikhs within our study, the nature of this attachment has shifted. The search for ontological security in the context of migration is now conducted through diasporic consumer displays, a symbolic representation of overseas migration and high izzat, within Punjab, such as the development of ever more ostentatious NRI houses on land which would have once been used to display agricultural strength. This process has, in turn, been exacerbated by the impact of global consumer culture and capitalist globalisation within Punjab and India more widely. The shifting nature of this transnational Jat Sikh Punjabi pursuit of home has been directly shaped by the shifting economic, cultural and social context of Punjab, South Asia, and processes of social inclusion and exclusion therein. NRI houses within Doaba, as ‘diaspora spaces’ (Brah 1996), are boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, an

attempt to distinguish and divide NRIs from the resident Doaban population. Through participation in global consumer culture within Punjab, the diasporic Jat Sikhs studied here are displaying their inclusion in a life (of conspicuous consumption) that the majority of Doaban residents are excluded from.

We have also seen how the divisions which have been facilitated by NRI consumer displays in Punjab have, in turn, led to the exclusion of NRIs from aspects of daily Punjabi village life and 'real Indian' status. The resulting experience of their lived Punjabi home, encountered upon regular trips to and stays within the Doaba region, consequently challenges the imagined Punjabi home (of wide ranging, reciprocal Punjabi village relations) which is often articulated in the context of the UK and symbolically represented through the interior design of UK Punjabi houses. The lived experience of the social, economic and cultural context of contemporary Punjab often leads to a significant reprocessing of the meaning of home amongst the Jat Sikhs studied when they are in India. Such reprocessing leads to an increased emphasis, by the migrants studied, upon their diasporic status and UK identity, and an interaction amongst the NRI community rather than the resident Doaban community, in Punjab. This further exacerbates the tendency amongst NRIs to pursue ontological security within Punjab through diasporic consumer displays, it demonstrates the contextual (Brah 1996) and 'never fully achieved' (Fortier 2003: 131; Mallett 2004; King and Christou 2011) nature of home and cements the crucial importance of examining the dynamic social context of South Asia, in addition to the 'host' and intra-diasporic social context, when discussing meanings of home and diasporic identity amongst South Asian migrants



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## Notes

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<sup>ii</sup> The Doaba region is currently comprised of four main districts: Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Kapurthala and Nawanshahar.

<sup>iii</sup> This is not to deny either the great diversity of castes within the 'Dalit' category, or the existence of many other castes besides Jats and Dalits within Punjab.

<sup>iv</sup> While we can point to significant Jat Sikh dominance of the resources enabling access to western migration, there has been some wider caste migration from Punjab to the UK where it is estimated that at least ten percent of the Punjabi population hail from the scheduled castes, with the majority from the Chamar community and the majority of these from the Doaba region (Hardtmann 2009). There are also other Punjabi populations (castes or sects) in the UK, who would not identify themselves or be identified with either Jats or Dalits. Nevertheless, Jat Sikhs are the majority Punjabi population in the UK.