

Human Trafficking in Punjab

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Human trafficking is a criminal act which affects the global community. Consequently, Punjabis, too, are the victims of human trafficking. The Punjabis' enthusiasm to migrate to affluent countries has given the traffickers an opportunity to exploit them. Using diverse *modi operandi*, people of different backgrounds involved in human trafficking have often put the lives of their clients in considerable danger. Failure in reaching their promised destination leads to deportation, exploitation, indebtedness, imprisonment and even death. What is more, when these migrants eventually arrive in a particular country they have been labeled criminals rather than victims of human trafficking. By way of contrast, in cases where such migrants have succeeded in settling abroad, they have sent huge remittances back to their families, enhancing their wealth. This paper explores the different dimensions and major actors involved in the business of human trafficking in Punjab. It concludes by evaluating measures being adopted to control it by both host and recipient countries.

Theoretical Formulations

Globalization is often illustrated in terms of increased 'flows' of money, goods, ideas or cultural values (Lintner, 2007; Bauman, 1999). But the movement of people across national borders remains highly regulated and a point of major contention between many countries. Advanced and industrialized countries spend billions of dollars each year to have control over inflows of people seeking greater economic opportunities. Despite efforts to legally regulate immigration, millions of people continue to seek passage to greener pastures. The push and pull of economic requirements has given rise to a new-fangled class of criminal people called 'human traffickers' (Lintner, 2007). These traffickers charge high fees and promise to deliver their charges to a new land and a new life. Discovering new techniques to evade outdated detection mechanisms, human traffickers and trans-national crime syndicates are increasingly flourishing by serving clients reach their goals. They also place their clients' lives in grave danger on the open seas and cargo transports and in jungles and in deserts (Salt and Stein, 1997:467-494; Vayrynen, 2003:12-15; Lintner, 2007).

According to the Wikipedia Encyclopedia human trafficking can be defined as

...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people for the purpose of exploitation. Trafficking involves a process of using illicit means such as threat, use of force, or other forms of *coercion*, of *abduction*, of *fraud*, of *deception*, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or

receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (emphasis in original, Encyclopedia, 2007).

Human trafficking has been further defined in international law in a broader way. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Crime 2000 in Article 3 stipulates that trafficking in persons

...mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at the minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or removal of organs (Protocol, 2001).

An indistinguishable definition of human trafficking is given in Article 4 of the Council of Europe Convention. Another important document, the EU Council Framework Decision on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in its Article 1 describes trafficking as

...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, subsequent reception of a person, including exchange or transfer of control over that person, where:

- (a) use is made of coercion, force or threat, including abduction, or
- (b) use is made of deceit or fraud, or
- (c) there is an abuse of authority or of a position of vulnerability, which is such that the person has no real and acceptable alternative but to submit to the abuse involved, or
- (d) payments or benefits are given or received to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation of that person's labour or services, including at least forced or compulsory labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery or servitude, or for the purpose of the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, including in pornography. (EU, 2002).

Thus, to sum up, human trafficking which has been defined by the various academicians and organizations - official as well as private - is recruitment, harbouring, transporting, providing or obtaining, by any means including the abuse of authority, any person for services involving forced labour, slavery or servitude in any industry, such as forced or coerced participation in agriculture, prostitution, manufacturing, or other industries in domestic service or marriage or put them into vulnerable position. Hence, the term 'human trafficking' includes multiple aspects involved in the trafficking of victims. At first, susceptible victims are recruited by the traffickers by using various methods of pulling or decoying. After that, successful or unsuccessful attempts are made to transport the obtained candidates to a destination or transit country. In the whole process, trafficked persons are forced, coerced and deceived by the individuals or organizations involved in trafficking in persons.

Human trafficking is a global industry which 'employs' millions of people and leads to the annual earnings of billions of dollars. It continues throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America because it is relatively less risky, perilous and hazardous. If one gets caught in human trafficking, he doesn't risk capital punishment. At the same time, there are more and more immigrants who are taking great risks to enter one of the countries with the help of human traffickers. Therefore, trafficking in persons within and across borders is increasing rapidly in South Asia and the Middle-East. Trafficking from Bangladesh and Nepal to India, Pakistan, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates is known worldwide (Yousaf, 2006:16; Dhungana, 2006:21). India has become the nucleus of human trafficking as the rate of cross-border and intra-state trafficking in human beings has mounted swiftly. Trafficking in women from the poor states to the rich states especially from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to Punjab has been reported many times in the electronic and print media. Similarly, due to the rising phenomenon of migration among Punjabis, reports and cases of illegal migration and human trafficking and of cheating and fraud by travel agents in Punjab have become a routine feature reported in daily and weekly newspapers and magazines at local, national and international levels. Punjab has become the hub of the 12,000 crore rupees human trafficking racket (Dogra, 2007:3). It is estimated that 10,000 to 20,000 Punjabis contribute to this flourishing business each year by paying anything between Rs. 2.5 lakh to Rs. 10 lakh each on being promised greener pastures abroad. The favoured destinations are mainly the USA, Canada, Australia, England, Italy and Greece (Dogra, 2007:3).

In Punjabi language, human trafficking is termed as '*kabootarbaazi*', traffickers as '*kabootarbaaz*' and victims as '*kabootars*'. As trafficking in human beings is one of hottest issues in Punjab, dominating electronic and print media and the policy formulation process of the state as well as central governments, we need to explore the social, economic, political, cultural and other factors which have promoted human trafficking. Further, human trafficking is not an act which involves a single individual. A number of people from different social, economic, political, cultural and religious backgrounds are involved through their trans-national connections and trans-national syndicates.

Therefore, it becomes imperative to study the functioning of these syndicates and the type of strategies and methods that are used or adopted by them and other actors involved in the illegal trade of human trafficking.

Human beings are direct victims of an illegitimate global business, which is replete with human rights violations and abuses on a large scale. It is important to understand what type of treatment is meted out to potential Punjabi migrants by trans-national syndicates at the beginning and end of their illegal journey to a foreign country. The affluent western countries especially of Europe and North America are the target countries of human traffickers. They are trafficking human beings to these destinations using diverse methods. Moreover, these countries are well aware of the same. Hence, a question arises as to what steps have been taken by these states to prevent or control such activities. As compared to other supplementary forms of trafficking, human trafficking or '*kabootarbazi*' in Punjab is an illegal business in which 'consent' of the victims, i.e., '*kabootars*' is also involved. They want to reach the destinations of their choice and earn handsomely and raise their standard of living. People who want to reach their desired countries through the trans-national syndicates have met with three outcomes. In some cases, they have reached the desired destinations and earned good money. In other cases, they have failed to reach and settle in the desired countries and have been deported back to Punjab. There are also a large number of instances where the agents, who are part of trans-national syndicates, have collected huge amounts of money from the candidates to send them abroad, but had cheated by not fulfilling their promise. Thus, given these circumstances, one is required to examine the impacts on the lives of successful as well as unsuccessful candidates. Another question here is to analyze the steps taken by both central and the state government of Punjab to prevent the illegal business of human trafficking. The present article is a modest attempt to seek answer to such questions in a systematic and scientific way while using documentary and official sources, studying reports published in the vernacular newspapers and conducting interviews with deported '*kabootars*'. With the help of interviews and field observations, an attempt has also been made to understand the functioning of '*kabootarbaazs*' and the types of mechanisms and channels they use in this illegal business.

Factors Responsible For Flourishing Human Trafficking

At the international level, human trafficking has accelerated due to numerous factors such as poverty, unemployment, war, civil war, natural disaster, discrimination, weak government, corruption and globalization (Pearson, 2000:33-39; Wijers and Lap-Chew, 1997:87). In the specific case of Punjab, there are numerous social, economic, cultural and political factors which have promoted trafficking in human beings. Formerly the land of five rivers, the Punjab remains one of the most advanced states of India. It occupies 50,362 square kilometers land mass which accounts for 1.54 percent of total geographical area of India. The state is divided into three regions – *Majha*, *Malwa* and *Doaba*. It comprises of around 24 million people who depend

primarily on agriculture and small manufacturing for their livelihood (Govt. of Punjab, 2007). Despite Punjab's relatively well-off economic status, an unabated wheeling and dealing with human lives to settle them abroad is taking shape in the form of organized crime with billions of dollars at stake. Further, unspecified laws of the land are providing human traffickers with a level playing field (Kamal, 2006).

Given Punjab's long history of migration the majority of Punjabis have always cherished the idea of settling overseas. Along with the charm of settling in a foreign land, population explosion, cut-throat competition, shrinking job opportunities, fragmentation of land holdings, stark poverty, opportunities offered by the affluent nations, and razzmatazz of Non-Resident Indians' (NRI) affluence has fuelled the desperation of moving abroad among them even more stridently (Zaidi, 2007:8). The mirage of a better life in foreign lands and hope of amassing huge wealth in a short span of time, despite the uncertainties, have become the fancy of many Punjabis. The pull of wealth and affluence of the west has not only attracted gullible young people, but there are also highly skilled professionals who go a long way to vie for the chance to leave, ever ready to part with their valuable skills. Besides, a good number of government officials are leaving their prestigious jobs to settle abroad, even ready to do jobs that they would feel ashamed of doing in their own country.¹ Along with an illiterate, unskilled and skilled workers, a substantial percentage of educated youths are also motivated to leave, even knowing well the consequences. An epidemic of drug addiction among the Punjabi youth is also compelling parents to send their children abroad. Parents want to save their children from falling into bad company, through which they often start taking drugs and gradually become addicts.² Therefore, by legal or illegal methods, they desperately want to send them abroad to save from drug addiction. Under such circumstances, parents in rural Punjab are even selling their landholdings and borrowing money from informal moneylenders on high interest rates to send their children abroad. Meanwhile, people living in the cities are seeking easy money from private banks for the same purpose (Kamal, 2006).

In an attempt to go abroad, Punjabis are using diverse methods to get around legalities. For example, sponsorship from relatives settled abroad, marriage to a foreign citizen or getting work permits and study visas (Zaidi, 2007:8). Earlier laws relating to migration were soft in receiving countries and it was easier to acquire a visa and go abroad in a legal way. But, as the receiving countries adopted new migration policies, this made it difficult to get visas and those desperate to go abroad started using unfair methods to get there, for example: after getting a tourist visa and on reaching abroad, they destroy the papers and disappear; travel on a forged visa; go along with one of the cultural troupes; obtain a temporary work visas for 'soft' countries in Africa or Asia, and then move to the west illegally by sea or land; travel on a valid visa, but on someone else's passport (Zaidi, 2007:8). Moreover, Punjabis have not even hesitated to put their lives and moral values at the stake while pursuing risky and immoral methods. For example, two brothers from Hoshiarpur district squeezed themselves in a cavity in the undercarriage of the aircraft meant for the wheels.

One of them was dropped dead when the plane landed and the other made it through the perilous journey to the United Kingdom, that too in a serious condition (Randhawa, 2007:7). Similarly, putting the moral and cultural values aside, after the legal recognition of gay marriages in the United Kingdom in 2006, many Punjabis applied through various travel agents, exploring the possibility of going abroad after marrying someone of their own sex. In some cases, brothers and sisters have gone through marriage rituals in their bid to get the visa. A number of Punjabi girls were made to tie the knot with NRI grooms, irrespective of their antecedents and many a girl thereby fell prey to men out to exploit the 'foreign fantasy', left in lurch after being used as a 'holiday wife' (Randhawa, 2007:7). All this, thus reflects that Punjabis are ready to go to any extent to get their feet on affluent foreign lands. And, therefore, their obsession for living in an affluent foreign land and becoming rich over night and lead a luxurious life has promoted the business of human trafficking beyond a limit. All those people who are connected with the business are exploiting the people of India, particularly Punjabis in Punjab.

Human Traffickers and Their 'Modus Operandi'

Human traffickers or '*kabootarbaazs*' belonging to diverse classes, categories and backgrounds have used different methods, sometimes specific to their profession, in trafficking Punjabis abroad. The weakness of Punjabis has given strength and encouragement to the different actors involved in human trafficking. In the veracity of getting a huge amount of money and becoming rich in no time, different types of people are indulging in the profitable business of 'human trafficking'. By taking the advantage of their position and profession and with the help of lopsided and asymmetrical government policies, politicians, religious preachers, singers, musicians, artists, athletes, organizers, promoters and theatre personalities have indulged in the lucrative racket of human trafficking (Singh, 2003:1).

The politicians have to do the least hard work in this business. The procedure used by the politicians in human trafficking is straightforward and less risky. They simply misuse their status and the facilities provided to them by the government. When they go abroad on official or private visits, they also take their staff along with them. They take a huge amount of money from the person who is willing to go abroad and put his or her name in the list of his members of staff. Due to their high position and connections, they often succeed in evading security checks and successfully board the candidates. Politicians have been exposed from time to time while engaging in human trafficking and in some cases have been caught red handed. In 2001, the name of a Punjabi politician of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) was highlighted in media for involvement in human trafficking. After a short period, the involvement of two ministers of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) was highlighted in the media (Dogra, 2007:3). Moreover in April 2007, Babubhai Katara, a BJP Member of Parliament (MP) from Gujarat was caught while attempting to traffic Paramjit Kaur and Amarjeet Singh of Kapurthala, on his wife's and son's passports while taking a huge sum

of Rs. 30 lakh from them (Editorial, 2007:10). The police recovered 12 passports from his residence in an overnight raid. Later on, during the police investigation, along with Babubhai Katara, the names of other politicians including those of Ramswaroop Koli, a BJP MP from Bayana, Rajasthan, Mohammed Tahir Khan, a Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) MP from Sultanpur, Uttar Pradesh and Mitrasen Yadav, a Samajwadi Party (SP) MP from Faizabad were also disclosed as being involved in human trafficking (Bhalla, 2007:1; Pasricha, 2007:6).

Bureaucrats play a decisive role in human trafficking. All the categories of actors involved in the business of human trafficking have to *enroute* through them. As an illustration, the bureaucrats help them in preparing fictitious passports, granting them sanction to organize cultural or musical shows and write to embassies in their favour. The bureaucrats working in this field have illegal relations with these people and help them to get through various hurdles. All the fictitious papers are prepared with the help of bureaucrats. Bureaucrats take considerable amount of money from these people. They being highly educated and top ranking officers are not easy to identify although they are the pillars of the unfortunate racket. Some of cases involving bureaucrats in human trafficking have come into limelight. The Ministry for External Affairs (MEA) had stripped a Special Secretary of the Indian Foreign Service, Rakesh Kumar of his post for his alleged involvement in a human trafficking case. The charges against Kumar relate to the time when he was Director General of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, which selects artists who represent the country in official functions abroad. Kumar was accused of breaking the rules and hurriedly selecting a *bhangra troupe* of 15 people, of whom nine disappeared on arrival in Berlin. Reportedly, 9 members had paid him a huge sum of money for sending them to Germany (Srivastva, 2006:4). In the other case, Delhi Police arrested Sanjay Kaushik, a former employee in the US Embassy who worked as a visa specialist in the late 1990s. Allegedly, he is considered as the master mind behind a human trafficking racket in which 32 persons, including some of the famous Punjabi artists, were arrested. Kaushik was arrested for facilitating the granting of visas in an illegal manner (*Indian Express*, 8 November, 2003:3).

Besides, religious leaders are also involved in such unscrupulous activities. While travelling to participate in religious seminars, conferences and ceremonies organized by the Punjabi community living abroad, religious leaders took some extra people as a part of their *ragi* and *dhadi jathas* who then stayed back for naturalisation. For example, a Sikh priest, Giani Inderjit Singh reached Canada using such modus operandi and is now a Canadian citizen. Hence, in a few cases, this method has been adopted by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) priests. In 2001, five priests of the SGPC went to Canada along with an official delegation of SGPC office-bearers for *Baisakhi* celebrations in Vancouver, but they scooted and never returned (Singh, 2003:1).

More to the point, Punjabi singers, musicians and other artistes are amassing huge wealth by indulging in the human trafficking business. A number of Punjabi artistes are very popular and have a good reputation in Punjab as well as in foreign countries. Punjabis well settled abroad in these foreign countries

send invitations to them regularly to do cultural shows in the UK, U.S.A and Canada. They are all already quite wealthy and have good social status, but the enticement of getting even richer make them indulge in human trafficking. They enroll the departing person as a member of their cultural troupe which they take to affluent foreign countries and leave them there. From there, departed candidates have to take responsibility to manage everything for themselves. In the last few years, many Punjabi singers are reported to have indulging in human trafficking. In 2003, a renowned Punjabi singer, Daler Mehndi was alleged to have been behind a criminal outfit bringing illegal immigrants to the United States and Canada under the guise of musicians and dancers for his overseas shows after taking large amount of money from them (Singh, 2003:1). In September 2004, Sukhi Brar, another famous Punjabi folk singer was singled out for allegedly helping an upcoming singer-dancer Baljinder Kaur to reach the United States. Further, on 19 October, 2007, Punjabi singer-couple, Balbir Mann and Sunita Mann were booked by the Punjab Police in Sangrur in a cheating case linked with human trafficking (Service, 2007:2).

Sports activities have also gradually developed as a preferred route in Punjab to illegally move to affluent foreign countries. In fact, sports clubs are flourishing in the Doaba region of Punjab on a large scale. Most of them specialize in getting invites from friendly sports associations in Canada and the US. These clubs send some people abroad for a hefty fee along with the genuine team members. The most notorious incident of using sports as a vehicle for human trafficking is the one where five girls, who were part of a 13-member cricket team from Punjab, slipped away. Two girls returned to join the team, but the rest are still untraceable (Rajta, 2007:17). The tour was organized by a Jalandhar-based Lynex Club. In 2005, six rafters of Punjab Armed Police went to participate in a tournament at AWOL in the United States while representing the Indian Rafting Association and never returned to Punjab (Rajta, 2007:17). In the same year, a grappler, Santokh Singh, went missing at the World Police Games in Quebec, Canada. Earlier in 2004, a basketball player, Manpreet Singh had disappeared in Canada. In August 2003, three handball players from a school in Sangrur district did the vanishing act in Italy. Similarly, in 2006, 19 *Kabaddi* players went to participate in tournaments at the invitation of the Ontario Sports Federation in Canada and stayed on there permanently (Rajta, 2007:17). There are numerous cases where members of hockey, football, Kabaddi, volleyball, tug of war and wrestling teams who went to the USA and Canada disappeared after reaching their destination.

Tracing the history of such operations, one finds that it was from about the mid-80s that the Punjabi community living abroad, perhaps as a marker of their newly acquired affluence, started sponsoring cultural and folk troupes, religious groups and sports teams for participation in Baisakhi and *Divali* festivals. Gradually, many of the enterprising promoters of these visits abroad thought of using the platform for taking 'foreign crazy' people as a part of their delegations on the payment of a hefty fee. Initially, those who were made members of the troupe were given some lessons in folk, culture, or religious discourses so that they could prove they were *bona fide* to the interviewing officials in the foreign

embassies. However, once the system was in place, the intake of 'non-performers' or 'sleeping performers' started increasing and the racket began spreading its tentacles (Singh, 2003:1). As a result, now every troupe or team going abroad is suspected by the foreign missions in New Delhi and many of the organizations have even been blacklisted (Singh, 2003:1). But even then, the business of human trafficking is flourishing in Punjab. On the other hand, wiser through experiences, foreign missions have started refusing visas to people wanting to go abroad as special observers for international events, conferences and seminars despite the recommendations made by even recognized Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and National Sports Federations (NSFs).

A large number of registered and unregistered travel agents operating in Punjab are the major source of human trafficking.³ These travel agents exploit those wishing to go abroad. They advertise their travel agencies and make unaccountable false promises to the candidates while not disclosing the problems they would have to face travelling to their destination. They take huge amount of money from them. The agents charge according to the destination and status of the country to which candidates want to migrate. For example, for migrating to the USA, Canada and UK, they charge higher rates compared to the other affluent countries like Greece, Italy, and Germany etc. Agents have their main offices in the major cities and have retained further agents based in local towns and villages to approach and search for potential candidates. Moreover, they give commission to the local agents. They have links with high officials and politicians of the state and embassies who help them in obtaining visas and making other arrangements in lieu of what they receive from the agents. In a way, there is a large network of these agents at local, national and international level which helps in running this business. These agents use diverse *modi operandi* to traffic the candidates and continue to find new methods to beat the immigration checks. As the detection of forgery in travel documents has become easier, photo-replaced passports have given way to use of valid passports and visas to reach countries close to the port of destination. From there, people slip in via land or sea routes. A number of Punjabis set off abroad using unfair means. They are helped by the agents who tamper passports and clandestinely arrange visas without revealing the realities to these aspirants. The situation is so grave that in 2005, in a small district of Kapurthala, 52 cases were registered and 44 travel agents suspected of trafficking were arrested by the Punjab police. Further, in the same year, the Punjab Police registered more than 500 cases against travel agents with Jalandhar topping the list with 118 cases, followed by Kapurthala with 77, Hoshiarpur with 58, Ludhiana 60, Patiala 38, Nawanshahr 26, Amritsar 18 and Barnala 15 (Kamal, 2006). In 2006, 755 illegal travel agents were arrested and more than 350 others had been identified operating illegally in Jalandhar, Nawanshahr, Ludhiana, Kapurthala and Hoshiarpur (Bharadwaj, 2007:3). The numbers of youth coming into the clutches of travel agents are astronomical with many illegal migrants being deported. In 2000, the Regional Passport Office (RPO), Jalandhar received 15,785 inquiries about people imprisoned abroad. The figure rose to 21,517 in 2001, 24,398 in 2002, 21,156 in 2003 and 19,101 in 2004 (Kamal, 2006).

Despite all this, Punjabis are continuing to go abroad with the help of such traffickers. There is a nexus between politicians, bureaucrats and travel agents involved in the human trafficking business. As a large number of travel agents and bureaucrats enjoy political patronage it is difficult to take action against them.

In reality, numerous people including politicians, bureaucrats, artistes, religious leaders, sports clubs and organizations and travel agencies are involved in human trafficking in Punjab. The consent of trafficked persons is also mixed-up with those involved in the business. Punjabis have been forced by diverse circumstances to migrate, even through use of prohibited means. Positions of vulnerability have been exploited by the people running the business of human trafficking. Further, certain high profile persons are misusing their power and position to run such a business and are using diverse methods to traffic their clients to their transit or destination countries.

Pangs of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking has resulted in numerous emotional, financial and social costs to the victims or '*kabootars*'. The success rate in trafficking is varied. In a number of cases, by exploiting loopholes in the legal system of recipient countries, they have been able to get legal shelter and citizenship. Whilst there, by working hard, they have earned good amount of income. Hence, by sending a large share of this income back to their families in Punjab, they have purchased more property especially in the form of land and have constructed new big houses called '*kothis*'. Such success stories, however, are seldom played up in the media. But anyone living in Punjab is capable of observing this development, an outcome of both legal migration and human trafficking. In this context, the case of Surjit Singh is worth mentioning. He went to the USA twenty-five years ago with the help of a human trafficker and settled there permanently. Now he is a legal citizen there and has even been able to sponsor his other family members from Punjab. Some of the family members still in Punjab are enjoying a comfortable life due to the remittances sent by him.⁴ Undoubtedly, this is the story of success of an illegal migrant or of the gains of illegal migration and human trafficking for the trafficked person and his family.

However, on a large scale, human trafficking has negatively affected the world by putting various lives into serious danger, including those of the Punjabis. As *Fortress Europe* observes, at least 8,175 people have died along the European frontiers due to this illegal business since 1988. Along with them, 2,755 were missing in the sea (Europe, 2007). In the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean towards Spain, 6,027 persons died in the process of trafficking. In the Sicily Channel 1,929 people died along the routes from Libya and Tunisia to Malta and Italy, including 1,118 missing and 33 other people drowned sailing from Algeria to Sardinia. Along the itinerary from Mauritania, Morocco and Algeria towards Spain, through the Gibraltar Strait or off the Canary Islands, at least 2,929 people died, including 1,206 who were missing. Then, 514 people died in the Aegean Sea, between Turkey and Greece, including 252 missing. Further, 474 people died in the Adriatic Sea between Albania, Montenegro and

Italy. The sea is crossed by being aboard makeshift boats. Sailing hidden inside registered cargo vessels, 148 died by asphyxiation or drowning. In order to reach the sea, the hazardous passage of the Sahara is obligatory. Many people, in the process of trafficking, have crossed it on trucks and off-road vehicles along the tracks between Sudan, Chad, Nigeria and Mali on the one side and Libya and Algeria on the other. On this route, at least, 1,069 people have died. Travelling stowaways in the trucks, 247 people were found dead in Albania, France, Germany, Greece, Turkey, UK, Ireland, Italy, Holland, Spain and Hungary. There are still mine-fields along the Evros River between the Greece-Turkey borders where at least 88 people died over the mines trying to enter Greece. Additionally, 51 persons drowned crossing rivers delimiting the frontier between Croatia and Bosnia; Turkey and Greece; Slovakia and Austria; and Slovenia and Italy. Likewise, 41 people froze to death in their track through the icy mountains at the borders between Turkey, Greece and Slovakia; 20 died under the trains in the Channel tunnel trying to reach England; 33 people were shot dead by Spanish and Moroccan police or injured along the border fence of the Ceuta and Melilla Spanish enclaves in Morocco; 11 people were burnt after a deportation centre in Holland caught fire; another 11 people were killed by Turkish, French and Yugoslav policemen; and 8 men were found dead hidden in the undercarriages of planes (Encyclopedia, 2007a and Daly, 2002:A4).

Among these casualties, the Punjabis have a large share. To date, more than 1800 Punjabis have died in this way (Service, 2007a:3). Many a times the stories of Punjabis, of their failures in trafficking, leading to death, have acquired screaming headlines in media. In an unsuccessful case, on 25 December, 1996, 170 youths from the Doaba region of Punjab were drowned in the Malta-Sicily channel along with 88 Pakistanis and 149 Sri Lankan illegal migrants. However, even after this tragedy, youth wishing to go abroad, by whatever method available, did not change their mind. In an unsuccessful case, on 18 May, 2001, two Punjabis - Karnail Singh and Gurmukh Singh - were jailed for trying to traffic 12 illegal Indian migrants into Britain in the back of a refrigerated metallic container packed with meat. These migrants were sitting, wearing coats, on packs of chilled meat. These arrests had revived memories of a gory incident which occurred on 20 June, 2000, in which 58 Chinese stowaways were suffocated to death in an airtight truck of tomatoes at Dover in the UK. In another case, on 29 March, 2001, 33 Indians were discovered by the Czech Police hidden in a truck which was heading from the Lovosice Ro-La for Germany. At that time, it was the largest ever group of refugees attempting to cross over to Germany in a truck. Again, most of those arrested were Punjabis (Singh, 2001:4).

In spite of traumatic experience, the craze for foreign shores has not abated. Nowhere is the passion more pronounced than in the dollar-rich Doaba region, which accounts for 1.3 million expatriates over in the last five decades. Doaba is the focal point for well-entrenched travel agents who operate at the village level. These agents are part of a multi-tier international smuggling racket with bases in Delhi, Mumbai and abroad (Vinayak, 2002). The thought of living in an affluent western country is so engraved in the minds of Punjabis that they do not even

shy away from exploring the not so desirable routes to reach their favoured destinations. In the process, some end up in jail or dead as happened with the 1996 Malta boat tragedy which still haunts the Punjabis (Kamal, 2006). Balwant Singh Ramoowalia, a former Union Minister of India and President of the Lok Bhalai Party, who has been raising the voice against unscrupulous travel agents for several years, disclosed on 19 April, 2007, that 30,000 Punjabis are languishing in jails abroad (Dhaliwal, 2007:3) and round about 1500 illegal migrants have died in 20 countries (Press Trust of India, 2007:2). Out of the thousands of Punjabis dumped by travel agents, nearly 400 are said to be in various jails in Sri Lanka. Others are lodged in jails in Algeria, Ukraine, Mali, Sudan, Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco, Italy and Russia. According to Ramoowalia, he visited Turkey, Pakistan, Italy, Thailand and other countries to get them released. He succeeded in getting free 14 Punjabis from Turkey, 31 from Pakistan, 70 from Italy and 100 from Thailand. Further, around 80-90 Punjabis were released by Algeria and Morocco after intervention by office-bearers of the Lok Bhalai Party in the United Kingdom. Likewise, 80 Punjabis were freed from Doha (Dhaliwal, 2007:3).

Thousands of trafficked people from India in general and Punjab in particular are languishing in various jails, refugee homes and refugee camps in Europe alone. The Czech and Slovakia are the latest transit points for illegal migrants who after getting the political refugee status there, continue to pursue their goal of getting into a more affluent country. Greece, Italy, and Austria are the other favoured countries. Similarly, Mexico has become the 'waiting room' for illegal migrants trying to sneak into the USA. A report published in the *International Herald Tribune* disclosed in 2001 that a visit to Mexico's main immigration detention centre was a glimpse into the globalization of trafficking in people. Virtually 400 prisoners were being held there from 39 countries. These included 86 from Ecuador, 84 from India, 26 from Cuba, 25 from China and the rest from Albania, Russia, Ukraine, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Yemen, Jordan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (Singh, 2001: 4).

The prospective candidates, carrying only rucksacks or backpacks, endure squalid travelling conditions on way to their destinations. At times, they have to criss-cross the countryside at night, through snow-clad hills and hostile terrain. They even cross rivers and channels at the risk of getting swept away by the strong currents (Gill, 2001:6). Sometimes, they get attacked by the wild animals. They survive on just a few pieces of dry bread, bit of tea and water. One such illegal migrant, Bhupinder Singh, of Cheema Khurd of Jalandhar District narrated his experience of an illegal and horrible journey which was arranged by a travel agent. He stated that he paid 7.70 lakh rupees to a travel agent who took him to Delhi. There he was put up in a small hotel with a few other persons harbouring similar ambitions. Then, he was put on a flight to Moscow along with the other fellows. After reaching Moscow, they were locked up in a room for eight days. From there, they were packed inside container-trucks and crossed the border into Ukraine. They were asked to tear up their passports in the jungle. Around 45 of them were shut inside the container and the weather conditions were terrible and dreadful. As a result, their legs froze.

They spent 24 days in the dark and thick jungles. There was only very little food to enable them survive. They drank off puddles to cross the border into Slovakia, but the security forces opened fire. Although nobody was killed in the firing, yet Bhupinder Singh along with his fellows-riders, was 'hand-cuffed', 'fingerprinted', 'photographed', 'beaten up' and thrown into a detention centre. Following this, he was sent back to Ukraine. Later on, from there they were deported back to India (Zaidi, 2007:8). Out of other victims of the fraudulent travel agents, two other Punjabis, Tejdeep Singh from Tarntaran District of Majha region and Sukhwinder Singh from Malwa region also shared their unforgettable experience of an illegal journey for desirable destinations. Tejdeep Singh paid a huge amount of money in 2002, for entry to France. The travel agent did not provide him any details of his illegal journey. He was dropped on the border of Poland. His illegal journey came to an end when he was caught by the Polish security forces and deported back to India.⁵ On the other hand, through the help of a relative police officer in 2004, parents of Sukhwinder Singh of Patiala, paid Rs. 5-6 lakh to the travel agent for sending their son to Germany. Like Bhupinder Singh, Sukhwinder Singh was also taken first to Tashkent and then to Ukraine by the travel agent. There, with eight other persons, he stayed in a dirty house with poor accommodation. While travelling to the next point, Sukhwinder Singh revealed that all of their belongings, including their passports, clothes and small amounts of money were stolen by somebody. Their Indian agent dropped them in a deep jungle where they survived on a few pieces of bread in the absence of proper food. Before they could shift to another place or cross the border towards their desired destination, they were arrested by the Ukrainian Police. Sukhwinder and his colleagues spent six months in jail in the Ukraine from where they were deported to Moscow. From there they were only able to come back to India due to the titanic efforts of Velantine, a women human right activist in Russia. During his days of imprisonment, Sukhwinder's parents contacted the travel agent many times. The travel agent told a lie every time he was contacted. Sometimes he said that their son has reached the Czech Republic or Slovakia and sometimes he said he was somewhere else and/or that he is very close to his destination, Germany. The travel agent never disclosed the information of Sukhwinder's imprisonment. When Sukhwinder arrived back home, he had fallen ill also.⁶

After reaching their destinations, the illegal migrants are forced by the circumstances to stay in cheap places and in groups (Singh, 2001:4). Illegal immigrants do different types of work until they can obtain permanent settlement. An illegal migrant, Harvinder Pal, who was deported back to India, narrated his work experience in Italy. He said that prior to deportation, he spent three months selling beer and soft drinks on a beach. He harvested fruits, worked on construction sites and even made 300 chapattis a day for other illegal workers from India (Swami, 2007:4).

Most of the illegal migrants consist of non-skilled persons. Hence, as with Harvinder Pal Singh, they work as hawkers, agricultural workers, janitors, and construction workers. At present, in US, there are more than 12 million illegal migrants. Their number grows at the rate of half a million annually (Swami,

2007:6). Europe has a figure of 4.5 to 8 million illegal migrants. These illegal migrants have boosted the economies of recipient states. Without them, the economy of the recipient countries would be hit hard. In the United States, a quarter of all agricultural workers, one in five janitors and a seventh of the construction workers were illegal migrants. Similarly, they contribute 7 to 16 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) (Swami, 2007:6).

When illegal migrants are caught by police authorities, they are punished according to the law of the land and also leads to deportation to the home country. One such victim is Buta Singh of Bara Pind of Jalandhar District. He went to Canada on a tourist visa, disappeared there and started working on a petrol pump. Later on, he was traced by the Canadian Police and was sent back to Punjab, India.⁷ Beyond doubt, these illegal migrants breach the law of their host country by making an illegal entry, by working without permits and sometimes by falsifying documents including the passports of that country to migrate the other destinations. On 20 April, 2007, the UK authorities held 6 Punjabis for possessing forged UK passports. All of them were seeking to fly to Canada from Birmingham. Earlier, before making an attempt to Canada, they had successfully made an illegal entry to the UK (Service, 2007b:1). The beneficiaries of human trafficking are those who win protracted legal battles and achieve legitimate legal right to permanent stay and work.

Although human trafficking is largely male dominated there have been cases of some Punjabi women, trafficked abroad by unscrupulous traffickers with the promise of lucrative jobs, who have been forced to work in the prostitution industry (Thind, 2007:3). For example, more than 85 Punjabi young women have been forced into prostitutes in Singapore alone (Editorial, 2007a: 8).

Another disturbing dimension is that a growing number of illegal migrants had been recruited by the pro-Khalistan organizations in Europe to expand the thin ranks of Khalistan terrorist groups based in Europe and Pakistan. For example, Kuldeep Singh, a top activist of Paramjit Singh Panjwar's Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) was the resident of Chak Bamu village in the Hoshiarpur district. He was one of the many young people from the area who went abroad through illegal means in the early 1980s. He had no previous record of terrorist sympathies. Indeed, Doaba youth largely distanced themselves from the Khalistan movement to avoid police records that could jeopardise their prospects of emigrating legally, through marriage or through the sponsorship of relatives. The travel agent who took Kuldeep Singh abroad, did not take him far. And like other estimated 10,000 Punjabis living illegally in Belgium, he ended up doing odd jobs in a pathetically poor way. At this point, he along with another illegal immigrant, Pala Singh of Talwandi Dadiyan, met Parsan Singh, President of the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) of Belgium. Parsan Singh convinced the two young men that their sole chance of redemption lay in working for the cause of the Sikh community. On 10 June, 1996, Kuldeep Singh landed in Pakistan, using a fake passport acquired from the flourishing underground market in travel documents. Sukhwinder Singh from Phagwara and Surjeet Singh Behla, also from a village in Hoshiarpur district flew with him to Pakistan and all three were received at the airport by

the Khalsa Commando Force (KCF) chief Nishan Singh. Pala Singh had arrived at the camp in Lahore three months earlier. Eventually, a group of seven recruits were sent to a camp on the Pak-Afghan border, where they were trained in the use of assault rifles and automatic weapons as well as the fabrication of improvised explosive devices. In early 1996, Kuldeep Singh was instructed by Panjwar to make his way to India carrying explosive material, timer switches and detonators. Kuldeep Singh became Punjab's most wanted KCF terrorists (Swami, 1997:4, 5).

Meanwhile, a number of illegal migrants apply for political asylum in the host countries, especially in the UK, USA and Canada. They pleaded the argument of discrimination, suppression, physical torture and other human rights abuses by the Indian State against them. However, a refusal to give them political asylum by the respective countries leads to their deportation (Ramchandran, 2007). The available data shows that at least 5 Punjabis are deported to India daily from the different countries. Moreover, since 2002, 10,165 Punjabis, residents of four districts of Doaba region - Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Kapurthala and Nawanshahr - and three districts of Majha region - Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Tarnataran - have been deported to India (Joshi, 2007:4). The data also reveals that in these seven districts, the number of deported persons was 1,175 in 2002, 2,122 in 2003, 1,360 in 2004, 1,983 in 2005 and 2,266 in 2006 along with 650 in 2007 respectively (Joshi, 2007:7). The deportation of illegal Punjabi migrants was the highest in 2006 in these seven districts of Punjab. Besides, in 2007, till now, as the Regional Passport Office (RPO) reveals, 650 Punjabis hailing from Majha and Doaba have been deported (Joshi, 2007:4). Despite all this, demand for passports is growing rapidly in Punjab. As Amarjeet Singh, Passport Officer of the Regional Passport Office (RPO), Jalandhar, reveals, the concerned authorities issued about 2.1 lakh new passports in 2006. Interestingly, as he further reveals, people are also lining up to apply a second or a third time. The number of applications for passports in the category 'lost' or 'damaged' have increased significantly. In 2003 there were 4,540 such applications and in 2006, their number was 10,367. The office detects at least 15-20 cases of applications for duplicate passports, where people apply for a fresh passport without disclosing the fact that they already have one (Zaidi, 2007:10).

A number of trafficked persons who, under different contexts, were deported to India, now, have to face a more hard and tough life in terms of finance than during the pre-trafficking period. They or their parents spent huge amounts of money to send them abroad and this had to be financed somehow. Some of them borrowed from private moneylenders on a high rate of interest, using their houses, shops or farm land as collateral, others sold their land, hoping that after earning money abroad, they will get rid of their debt. On return they have sunk into indebtedness for their whole life. In the other words, they have a bleak and depressing future, with exorbitant debt and the shame of inability to provide for their families hanging over them. Four Punjabis, e. g., Ajay, Naresh, Sonu and Mandeep had the same experiences. Ajay's family pooled their jewellery and mortgaged their home. Correspondingly, Naresh sold the Sugarcane farm, Sonu

sold a Buffalo and his farm and Mandeep sold two toy stores to arrange the money to go overseas. After facing extradition to India, now, they face a dark future (Brothers, 2007).

As mentioned earlier, trafficked persons have also been major beneficiaries where they have successfully acquired citizenship in their destination countries and this enabling them to improve their financial status. But, in the majority of cases, as the facts reveal, they have been cheated by the traffickers. Traffickers have put them on treacherous and perilous voyages, which have ultimately led to victims' death, imprisonment, exploitation, deportation and indebtedness.

Human Trafficking, Parent States and Deterrent Mechanisms

All over the world, states have enacted various legislations and evolved deterrent mechanisms to restrain the activities of traffickers. As India is a major source as well as a destination of human trafficking, it enacted the Emigration Act of 1983 to control these illegal activities. However, with the passage of time, it proved sufficient to deal with the matter. After the Babubhai Katara case, and exposure of some other parliamentarians' involvement in human trafficking, in 2007, the question was again discussed in the Indian Parliament. There was talk of some appropriate action against the parliamentarians involved in such criminal activities. Soon after the spotlight, the BJP suspended its MP Babubhai Katara from the party membership. Moreover, the government of India has initiated a move to amend the Emigration Act to curb such practices by giving more teeth to the law. The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has decided to amend the 1983 law to regulate emigration and rein in unscrupulous agents. It is believed that the amendment will provide harsher punishment for those convicted of human trafficking, including an increase in minimum imprisonment to five years from the current six months. The fine is also proposed to be increased manifold from the present 1,000 rupees to 25,000 rupees. The main objective of the amendment is to curb the prevalence of unauthorized recruiting agents by ensuring their registration and regulation. The Bill provides a regulatory framework in respect of emigration of Indian workers for employment abroad with the aim of safeguarding their interests and ensuring their welfare. The intention is to make agents responsible for the recruitment of every person sent abroad. The agents will have to provide reports to the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs every year which will form the basis for renewal of their licences. The number of emigration clearances granted by the Protector of Emigrants has increased from Rs. 2.79 lakh in 2001 to 5.49 lakh in 2005. Workers going abroad for jobs include skilled and unskilled persons and remittances by them were to the tune of over Rs. 52,000 crore in 2005-2006. The amendment Act is aimed at addressing an increasing number of complaints about harassment and ill-treatment of Indian workers abroad. They are denied of promised wages and food and lodged in inhuman conditions. Passports of employees are seized by their employers as soon as they land in a particular country and they are at the mercy of the employers (Press Trust of India, 2007:2). The proposed amendments in the Emigration Law of 1983 will

definitely help to check human trafficking and will make the agents responsible. Since number of Punjabis going to different countries abroad is large they will also benefit from the proposed changes in the emigration law. Besides, along with the proposed amendment in Emigration Law of 1983, on 4 December, 2007, the Ministry of Women and Child Development launched '*Ujjawala*', a comprehensive scheme for the prevention of trafficking. It includes rehabilitation and rescue of trafficked persons. It also aims at cutting entry points to the illegal professions. The '*Ujjawala*' was formulated and included in the Eleventh Five Year Plan and Rs. 10 crore were sanctioned for 2007-08 (Sharma, 2007:15). It is believed that this scheme will be useful for the victims of traffickers including Punjabis.

Earlier the Government of Punjab did not show any interest in tackling this problem. But after the large number of cases of human trafficking reported in the state, the arrest of Babubhai Katara while trying to take two Punjabis abroad and the laudable efforts of Balwant Singh Ramoowalia, the Chief Minister of Punjab, Prakash Singh Badal announced on 25 April, 2007 to appoint the Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) to expeditiously deal with such cases (Service, 2007c:1). He also ensured that fake advertisements given by unscrupulous agents and immigration consultants would be severely dealt with as per law and such cases would be settled within a strict time frame. A mechanism would be evolved to prove the authenticity of such advertisements. Moreover, an independent department of NRI Affairs would be set up to keep an eye on illegal activities of travel agents (Bureau, 2007:2). Reportedly, the Government of Punjab is also set to enact the Punjab Prevention of Human Trafficking Act to arm the police with more powers to check illegal human migration. Reports also reveal that the government of Punjab has prepared a draft of the Bill. The Home and Justice Department of Punjab have already whetted the draft which will be sent for approval of the Cabinet before it is tabled in the Punjab Legislative Assembly. The Draft of Bill includes pecuniary penalties and severe punishment for travel agents who defraud people on the promise of sending them abroad through dubious means. Severe punishment means the bigger the fraud or cheating committed by the agents, the longer would be the imprisonment (Banergee, 2007:1, 5). The Bill also covers travel agents who provide consultancy or guidance to different categories, including people approaching agents for emigration, for obtaining higher education, for working in a foreign country on a work permit or on contractual, professional and business assignments, for a pleasure trip as a tourist, for medical treatment, for cultural or musical shows, religious preachers and for participating in sports tournaments. Issuing advertisements for travel to foreign countries or holding of seminars or conferences to promote emigration are also covered as activity of agents. To give some relief to the trafficked persons, '*Punjab State Human Trafficking Victim Relief Fund*' has been proposed to be constituted by the state government. Any amount received from confiscation of illegally acquired property of travel agents will go to this Fund. All agents have to be registered. He/she will be issued an agent's licence without which the government will not allow any agent to function. The licence can be cancelled if the agent indulges

in or abets, directly or indirectly, any act prejudicial to the interests of India or contrary to government policy. An agent has to provide a bank guarantee or pledge immovable assets worth Rs. 10 lakh. The police are empowered to carry out searches, seizures and arrests. Any executive magistrate or a gazetted officer of the police or any other department of the State Government can search the premises where it is suspected that the agent could have hidden some documents pertaining to the case. However, the searches would be carried out only during the day. Any property acquired from the money accruing from this business is liable for confiscation. Where the value of illegally acquired property or the cheated amount is up to Rs. 5 lakh, the agent is liable to rigorous imprisonment for two years or a fine which may extend to Rs. 50,000. However, in case an agent cheats a person of Rs. 10 lakh, the imprisonment will extend up to five years along with a fine of Rs. 1 lakh. Similarly, if the agent cheats a person of an amount up to 50 lakh rupees, the imprisonment will be up to seven years and a fine of 2 lakh rupees. If the cheating involves a sum in excess of 50 lakh rupees, the prison term can be extended up to 10 years and a fine of 5 lakh rupees. If a travel agent holds back the passport of a person without any justification, he has to face a fine extending up to 50,000 rupees.

Besides this, on various occasions the Punjab Government has raised the issue of human trafficking with the Central Government. As a few recipient states have initiated amnesty schemes for illegal migrants living on their territory, numerous Punjabis are unable to get the benefit of such schemes due to the lack of relevant documents. Hence, in June, 2007, Prakash Singh Badal, Chief Minister of Punjab, through an official letter, urged the Ministry for External Affairs to advise the consulates and embassies in the other countries to provide all the possible assistance to Punjabi immigrants, to avail the benefits of amnesty schemes for regularising them in the recipient countries. A request was also made to give them duplicate Indian passports so that they could avoid prosecution by getting general amnesty (Ministry for External Affairs, 2007).

In brief, the Indian State is trying to suppress illegal migration and human trafficking through legal measures and has launched a scheme to help the victims including the Punjabis. At the same time, the Punjab government is also taking some steps to check the illegal business of trafficking.

Destination Countries and Their Response

Most of the countries in Europe and North America are recipients of human beings through trafficking. Approximately, more than 600,000 to 800,000 persons are trafficked annually worldwide, out of which 100,000 to 500,000 persons are trafficked to Europe and 14,500 to 17,500 to the USA (Djanjsezian, 2005; Floor, 2006:23). As human trafficking has put the burden on land and other resources of these states, they have started to react against this trend. Resistance to human trafficking is no doubt much stronger in the nation-states of Europe than in countries that are built on immigration: the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. But even - or especially - Australia has seen the emergence of both anti-immigration political parties asking for harsh

treatment of asylum seekers. A few countries, such as Australia, have adopted strict policies vis-à-vis asylum seekers. The number of immigrants and refugees that Australia admits has steadily declined. The government sternly refused to accept asylum seekers on to the Australian territory. They became a test case for the determination of a government to keep illegal immigrants out of the country. A recent survey in New Zealand showed that a strong opinion believes that there are 'too many Asians' in the country (Lintner, 2007). In the European Union, the migration issues have recently dominated the political agenda. In a significant move, in February 1997, the Council adopted a joint action to combat the trafficking of human beings along with the sexual exploitation of children. Moreover, in July 2002, the EU Council adopted a Framework Decision on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings that defined common guidelines for the jurisdiction, nature of offences, penalties and sanctions pertaining to human trafficking. The EU is putting more emphasis on preventing illegal immigrants and integrating existing immigrants in the host society. It has also taken measures to return or deport refugees, including Punjabis, to India, which is considered now safe for them (*Indo-Asia News Service*, 2007:10). The European Union has also created a new agency, *Frontex*, to keep control on human trafficking and illegal migration and police its frontiers more rigorously (Naravane, 2007:24; Carrera, 2007:1-11; Carrera and Geyer, 2007:4). Likewise, the British Crime Act, 2002, the Gangmasters (licensing) Act, 2004, the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act, 2005 and Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act of 2006 also encompass various anti-trafficking and anti-illegal migration provisions. The 'Reflex', a multi-agency taskforce on organised immigration was established in 2004. In 2006, the formation of 'Reflex' was followed by the creation of another anti-trafficking organization, 'Serious and Organised Crime Agency', briefly known as, 'SOCA' (House of Lords, et. al., 2006:39-42). Moreover, recently, under a new system of civil penalties, Britain has announced to impose a penalty of up to £10,000 on employers hiring illegal workers (*Press Trust of India*, 2007:10). All these steps had been taken by the recipient/destination countries to prevent illegal migration and trafficking of people including Punjabis to their territories. Besides, so far as the question of illegal migration and trafficking of Punjabis is concerned, the recipient states had also discussed it with the Indian as well as the Punjab government. Soon after the UK High Commissioner to India, Sir Michael Arthur, declared India as a 'safe' democratic country for all including its minorities. And, therefore, he refused to consider cases of political asylum by the UK government in the future. He also took up the issue of unscrupulous agents with the Chief Minister of Punjab urging him to discourage illegal practice. He also cautioned the Punjabis against 'back-door' migration to his country. While advising to adopt legal methods, he said, "...it is easier to enter through the front door as we issue about 1,000 visas to Indians every day. We have a visa application centre here and people can utilize its services" (Singh, 2007:3).

In a nutshell, while trying to prevent illegal migration and human trafficking to their respective territories, the destination countries have ratified and formulated various special laws and created special agencies to police

international borders. More to the point, destination countries have also put the matter before the states and provinces including India and Punjab, which are the major source of human trafficking.

Conclusion

To conclude, human trafficking, being an intractable problem worldwide, is badly affecting the Indian Punjab which is a source as well as a destination. Allurements of foreign land, cut-throat competition, dwindling employment opportunities, crumbling of land holdings, opportunities offered by the developed countries, and razzmatazz of NRI and cultural factors are the factors behind the increasing tendency among the Punjabis to settle abroad by hook or crook, contributing to provide a boom to the prohibited act of human trafficking in Punjab. A number of actors such as politicians, bureaucrats, artistes, religious leaders and organizations like sports clubs and travel agencies are earning huge amounts in this business. These human traffickers have cheated, deceived and exploited the Punjabi clients many times by hiding the realities, looting money and putting their lives into jeopardy. Countless Punjabi clients have ended up being deported and in indebtedness, imprisonment and death. Belatedly the Indian and Punjab governments have taken certain steps to deal with the menace of human trafficking and have launched a few schemes to provide relief to and rehabilitation of the victims. The destination countries are acting in the same manner. Efforts should be made to break the official and non-official nexus involved in human trafficking. People should be educated about the risks involved in human trafficking. A consensus based decision should be made by all political parties to discourage entry of such persons into politics and highly respectable democratic institutions like the Legislative Assembly and Parliament. It is, therefore, necessary to take some harsh steps on the trans-border level as the illegal business of human trafficking is being run by trans-border international mafias. Ultimately unless the root causes which burgeon human trafficking are not tackled, even the most rigorously policed frontiers will be unable to check the invidious crimes.

Notes

1. In India, the job of a university or college teacher is considered a reputed one. But, it has been found that many of the college and university teachers are also eager to migrate to rich western countries especially to ensure a safe and prosperous future for their kids. Following this, 20-25 teachers of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar have migrated to these affluent countries especially to UK, USA and Canada. Some of them have resigned from the University job and the others have availed the leave without pay. In the foreign lands, these teachers are doing small and hard jobs. Though, the teachers are using legal channels, craze to go abroad among them is equal to that of other Punjabis.

2. The analysis is based on the discussion with different people who are eager to send their children abroad by hook or crook. Numerous cases of illegal migration from rural Punjab also justify this observation and analysis.
3. A few travel agents were interviewed in Amritsar, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana and Patiala. None of them were ready to accept their link or involvement in any type of illegal business including human trafficking and illegal migration. Each of them claimed the use of a legal, legitimate and a safe path. All of them were putting the blame for human trafficking and illegal migration on their unknown fellows. They have a common answer, "*Bha ji asin taan ik number vich bhejde han. Do number vich khatarnak tarike naal bhejan wale hor han. Asin oh nahi haan*" (Brother, we send the people abroad in a legal way. People, who use illegal methods, will be other. We are not those one).
4. An interview with Surjeet Singh and his family.
5. An interview with Tejdeep Singh.
6. These facts were disclosed, in an interview, by Sukhwinder Singh and his parents.
7. An interview with Buta Singh.

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