

FROM PUNJAB TO CANADA: MAPPING THE PUSH AND PULL FACTORS IN FEMALE STUDENT MIGRATION

Jaskiranjit Kaur

Junior Research Fellow

Department of Sociology,

Panjab University, Chandigarh

Abstract

Migration has become one of the most defining features of globalization, with student migration emerging as a key dimension of transnational mobility. This study investigates the push and pull factors driving Punjabi female students to migrate to Canada for higher education. While Punjab has a long history of out-migration, recent years have seen a sharp rise in young females seeking education abroad, reflecting not only economic pressure but also aspirations for independence and dignity. Using mixed-method approach, data was collected through 110 questionnaires and 10 in-depth interviews with Punjabi female students currently studying in Canada. The findings reveal that push factors such as lack of employment opportunities, influence from friends, gender inequalities and inadequate governance shaped their decision to migrate. At the same time, pull factors such as better educational opportunities, clear pathways to permanent residency, higher standards of living, safety, and gender equality make Canada the most desirable destination. The study concludes that migration is shaped not only by structural economic conditions but also by social and gendered aspirations. For Punjabi female students, moving to Canada represents both a strategy for upward mobility and project of self-realisation, making it a uniquely transformative migration pathway.

Key words: Female Student Migration, Push and Pull Factors, Higher Education

I. Introduction

Migration has always been central to human history, and in recent decades, international student migration has emerged as one of its most dynamic forms. Millions of young people are crossing borders to pursue higher education and for better future prospects. International student migration has become a significant trend in the changing global higher education landscape. International student migration has increased from 2.0 million in 2000 to 6.9 million in 2022 globally. (ICEF, 2023). It has not only reshaped academic institutions but also the socioeconomic and cultural dynamics of both the country of origin and the country of destination. Several factors have contributed to this significant rise in the number of students pursuing higher education outside their homeland countries. One of the major reasons is the limited availability of university seats in the developing nations, which has left many students with no choice but to seek opportunities abroad (Gribble, 2008). Apart from this, economic factors have also played a role, as advances in transportation and communication technologies, along with the decline in related costs, have made studying abroad far more accessible than in the past (Gribble, 2008). The growing trend of students seeking higher education abroad is further influenced by other significant factors, such as better prospects, appealing socio-cultural environments, and the strong academic reputation of overseas institutions (Shkoler & Rabenu, 2023).

Although factors like globalization, immigration policies, and marketing strategies of foreign universities also play a role in shaping the student migration, the actual decision is often rooted in personal aspirations, family expectations, and peer influence. These choices are driven by a combination of push factors-such as unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, political instability and insecurity of future in home country and pull factors, including perceptions of safety, better quality of life, academic and career opportunities, and presence of an established

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diaspora in host nation. Collectively, these elements align with Lee's Push-Pull Theory of Migration (1996), which serves as the conceptual framework for this study.

In the process of pursuing migration, once the motivation to migrate has been formed, the next critical stage involves the selection of the destination country which is often shaped by the structural push-pull factors, social networks and expected opportunities. This decision shapes both trajectory and outcome of entire migration process. In this context, international students are selecting Canada as one of their dream destinations for international education. According to IRCC (2024), the number of international students in Canada rose dramatically by 68%, from 616,585 in 2021 to 1,040,985 in 2023. Remarkably, 48% of these international students are female, indicating a substantial change in the gender distribution of participants in transnational education (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2024). It shows that Canada is perceived as a country offering high quality and affordable education with a safe and inclusive society. Canadian policies provide a clear path for permanent residency and have a great scope for career advancement (Canadian Bureau for International Education [CBIE], 2023). These aspirations coupled with career-oriented education in Canada is acting as one of crucial pull factor to migrate. Simultaneously, developing nations also face a number of push factors, including a lack of quality educational options, a rise in unemployment, strict gender norms, and social pressure. India, one of developing nation is the top sender country of international students to Canada, with study permit holders doubling in the past five years – from 218,540 in 2019 to 427,085 in 2023 (IRCC, 2023). Likewise, students from Punjab, a north-western state of India are also influenced by such push factors, which shapes their decisions and aspirations to migrate for better opportunities. Punjab contributes 60% of international students, underline the state's significant contribution to this migration trend. As per current estimates from institutions engaged in student visa processing, 3.4 lakh students from Punjab are enrolled in various colleges and

universities of Canada ((Bedi & Bedi, 2025). This is not just a numeric trend but a reflection of deeper motivational dynamics at play among the young of Punjab, particularly young female students seeking better futures. The contrasting realities of developed and developing nations also contributing to strong motivational landscape for migration.

The migration of female students from Punjab, is a significant aspect of this trend. Their decision to study in Canada is not just based on personal or academic reasons; it is also impacted by a distinct set of push and pull factors which are shaped by gendered social expectations, family dynamics and safety concerns. This surge in female-led academic migration represents a paradigm shift in gender roles, especially within the traditional societies. It also underscores the rising importance of understanding the factors that drive this movement, especially as female students make conscious, independent decisions to study abroad- often overcoming family, cultural, and financial barriers in the process. These differentiated aspects highlight the need of deeper scholarly engagement to fully grasp the gender-specific dimensions of migration.

Rationale of the Study

The phenomenon of international student migration has gained a considerable momentum over the past decades, with Canada emerging as a leading destination for students worldwide- particularly from India, and more specifically, Punjab. While the overall growth in student migration is well documented, there is limited research which explores the push and pull (motivational) factors that drive this trend among female students from Punjab.

Historically, in India, females in migration have been often been portrayed as passive participants, migrating as dependents of male members. Now females form 48% of total international students in Canada (IRCC,2023), females that are willingly migrating for better opportunities and pursuing education in a foreign land. The current trend reflects a new phenomenon: independent, aspirational female migration driven by academic and professional ambitions. The increasing

number of female students migrating from Punjab to Canada offers an opportunity to study why these young females are choosing to leave their home state and what are the factors draw them to Canada.

Therefore, this study is both timely and necessary. It responds to the evolving dynamics of gender, education, and migration, and provides a focused lens on the push and pull factors shaping one of the most rapidly growing yet under-researched trends in migration: the independent educational migration of Punjabi female students to Canada.

II. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to explore the Push and Pull (motivational) factors driving the migration of female students from Punjab, India, to Canada for higher education. This research focus on pre-migration phase, aiming:

1. To identify and analyze the push factors in Punjab that motivate female students to migrate for higher education abroad.
2. To examine the pull factors in Canada that attracts Punjabi female students to pursue higher education.

III. Methodology

A mixed-method approach was used in this study, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Primary data was gathered from Punjabi female students who had immigrated to Canada for higher education using a total of 110 closed-ended questionnaires and 10 semi-structured interviews. While the qualitative interviews offered deep insights into the motivations and experiences of the respondents, the quantitative survey assisted in determining the respondents' background characteristics and measuring important push-pull factors influencing migration.

Respondents were selected using snowball and convenience non-probability sampling methods.

The questionnaire, designed in line with the study's objectives, were created through Google Forms and distributed via personal contacts and social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook.

The qualitative data, 10 interviews were conducted through telephonic calls, video conferencing platforms (such as Zoom, Google Meet), and in some cases, in-person discussions during participants' visits to Punjab. Throughout the process, the researcher ensured neutrality, empathy and mindfulness in line with the qualitative research best practices.

The locale of the study spanned Punjab, India and Canada, capturing both the sending and receiving contexts of migration. The focus reflects the dramatic increase in Indian student enrolment in Canada-rising by 700% between 2015 and 2023, from 31,920 in 2015 to 278,365 in 2023 (IRCC, 2024).

IV. Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Data for this study was gathered through 110 questionnaires administered via Google Forms and supplemented with 10 in-depth interviews. The quantitative data was analyzed using Excel, while qualitative interviews provided further insights into student experiences and motivations.

The respondents shared several common characteristics. All were first-generation female migrants from Punjab, aged between 18 and 28 years, who had migrated to Canada within the last five years, from 2020 to 2024, to pursue higher education. A significant proportion, around 78% (N=86), came from agrarian families and had grown up in villages or small towns, highlighting the strong rural connection. In terms of educational enrolment, 42% (N=46) were pursuing undergraduate programs, 21% (N=23) were enrolled in postgraduate courses, while 37% (N=41) were undertaking various diploma programs. This distribution reflects the popularity of

short-term and skill-based programs among Punjabi students in Canada. With regard to marital status, 34% (N=37) of the respondents were married, while 66% (N=73) were unmarried. Among the married participants, 44% (N=16) lived in Canada with their spouses, whereas 56% (N=21) had partners who remained in India. Several married respondents also reported initiating spousal sponsorship applications to reunite with their partners in Canada. Among the unmarried respondents, 9% (N=10) responded living in common-law partnerships, reflecting diverse relationship patterns and support networks.

To ensure confidentiality and ethical integrity, all participant identities were anonymized in the presentation of findings.

Having outlined the demographic profile of the respondents, the next section examines the key themes that emerged from the data. The analysis begins with the push factors that compelled Punjabi female students to consider migration, highlighting the structural and personal challenges within their home state.

Push Factors of Migration

i. Lack of Employment Opportunities

One of the most prominent push factors, mentioned by 73% of the respondents, that lead Punjabi female students to Canada is the limited scope for employment in Punjab. Despite increasing levels of higher education, respondents highlighted that the local job market remains saturated, with opportunities often restricted to agriculture or low-paying private sector roles. Many described this as a case of “educated unemployment” and “wasted potential”, where degrees fail to translate into meaningful work.

26-years-old respondent, after completing her B.Tech., secured a job in a multinational company but earned only ₹25,000 a month while living far from her home. Reflecting on her situation, she remarked:

“If I must leave home, why not for better opportunities-why not Canada? Canada ch pardhi da mull pai janda (Education has real value in Canada)”

Today, after completing her MTech. in Canada, she is working as a Software Engineer with a far better salary package and living an independent life.

Similarly, a 19-year-old female respondent decided to migrate straight after school, without attempting to study or work in India. She had seen her elder sibling spending years preparing for government job in Punjab with no success. As she explained:

“Sarkari naukariyan ghatt ne, sarkar paper ve ni kadh di. Fer socheya, je private Naukri hi karni hai tan bahr jak e karaugi. Canada ch mehnat di kadar tan hai. (There are very few government jobs, and the government doesn't even hold recruitment exams on time. Then I thought, if I have to do a private job anyway, I'd rather do it abroad. At least in Canada, hard work is valued.)”

For her, migration was not a fallback but the first and most rational choice, shaped by both family experience and structural limitations at home.

This sense of stagnation is consistent with broader labour market trends in Punjab, where an increasing number of educated youths are entering a saturated and poorly diversified job market. According to Periodic Labour Force Survey (2024), the unemployment rate among youth aged 18-45 stood significantly above the national average. Moreover, these findings mirror those of Upadhyaya and Rutten (2012), who argue that in contexts where state and private sectors fail to provide adequate employment, migration becomes not just an economic response but a strategic life choice.

Beyond economic hardship, unemployment also carried symbolic consequences, such as dependent on family and diminished social standing, particularly for females. Migration,

therefore, emerged as both an economic necessity and an aspirational pathway towards dignity, independence, and professional recognition.

ii. Influence of Friends and Peer Pressure

61% of respondent identified friends, peers and social network as a major influence in their migration decision. This demonstrates that youth migration is not simply an individual choice but is embedded in social context and cultural narratives of success. As migration from Punjab to Canada has expanded over the past decade, it has become a normalised pathway to upward mobility, where staying behind is increasingly viewed as stagnation. As 21-years-old female respondent, studying in Montreal, stated:

“Everyone from my school was either in Canada or was applying. Back then, I was feeling like I have been left behind.”

This reflects what Nugin (2014) terms as “culture of migration” -a collective discourse that normalizes and glamorises the idea of going abroad. Within such cultures, peer encouragement can easily transform into social pressure, with migration framed as the only viable root to progress. Success stories-often shared through digital media platform like Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube -circulate widely, highlighting prosperity while downplaying struggle. These narratives become performative script that fuel collective aspiration and normalise migration as a community goal (Gardner & Osella, 2003).

For female student, the peer effect carries added weight, as it signals not only economic opportunity but also the possibility of great freedom and autonomy. Several respondents noted that seeing women of their age group abroad and “living freely” provided inspiration to migrate. Thus, peer influence intersects with gender norms, transforming migration into both a socially validated choice and a personal aspiration.

iii. Gender Inequality and Traditional Expectations

Nearly half of the respondents, 47%, expressed a strong desire to escape the orthodox and restrictive cultural environment of Punjab. This push factor reflects a broader conflict between youth aspirations for freedom and the deep-rooted norms of a patriarchal, collectivist society. For many young females, migration is not only an educational or professional choice but a deeply emotional negotiation of autonomy, often framed as an escape from rigid traditions, gendered constraints, and dowry pressures.

“In my home (in Punjab), even talking about staying alone, travelling with friends or doing marriage of your choice is not acceptable. I see Canada as a place where I can be myself.” – Female respondent, 22-years-old.

Such sentiments underscore what Garder & Osella (2003) describes as migration being tied to the aspiration for “modernity” – not just in material terms, but in personal autonomy, identity, and lifestyle. This is also in line with Montgomery (2010), who observes that youth migration is often about “functional relationships and cosmopolitan values”, particularly in regions where traditional structures limit individual growth.

On the other hand, some respondents shared their families supported migration precisely because they too recognised the limitations that society poses. In words of 26-years-old respondent, pursuing post-graduation diploma, from Toronto, said:

“My parents, especially my mother, want me to have what they didn’t have – freedom, safety, a chance to be something more. They said even if we marry you, we will spend lakhs on you. Instead, they choose to invest in me, motivate me to move to Canada. Here (In Canada), for the first time, I control resources by myself- I had never spent a paisa with my own will before (in Punjab). After finishing my studies, I will buy a house in my name. In Punjab that is not possible. I also send remittance back at home.”

Her account illustrates how migration serves as both an escape from patriarchal dowry norm and a pathway towards financial independence and autonomy. For these young females, migration to Canada represents entry to modernity, a space of fluid identity, autonomy, and self-defined life paths.

iv. Perceived Inadequate Governance and Migration Aspirations

A significant portion of respondents 42%, identifies inadequate governance in Punjab and India as a critical push factor influencing their decision to migrate. These inadequacies were not perceived as abstract policy shortcomings but as lived realities contributing to limited security, less economic prospects, and lower social mobility. Respondents described governance shortcomings across multiple dimensions. Corruption, nepotism, and red-tapism were frequently cited as rigid structural barriers to innovation and entrepreneurship. For families from agrarian backgrounds, who made majority of respondents, governance crisis was even more acute. Persistent agrarian distress, lack of fair crop pricing, crop insurance, supply of spurious seeds and farm chemicals, no guarantee of stable income had reinforced a sense of hopelessness. In their words the state “*does not listen,*” had left families to feel excluded from both economic progress and political voice.

This sense of governance betrayal also extended to education and employment opportunities. Respondents pointed to the irregularity of government recruitment exams, excessive delays in recruitment process as evidence of systemic inefficiency. One of respondent reflected in her own words,

“It was my parents’ decision more than mine. They told me, we don’t want you to struggle like us. In Punjab, governments don’t listen to farmers, youth have no jobs and even well educated are either sitting idle at home or protesting on the roads. Canada felt like the only option for a secure future.”

These narratives resonate with de Haas's (2001) concept of capability deprivation, where poor governance limits individuals' ability to realize their potential. Similarly, Salazar's (2011) notion of migration imaginaries how local governance failures are contrasted with idealised vision of a destination developed country, which is seen as stable, transparent and liveable society. In this Context, Canada was imagined as offering political stability, consistent policies, and fairness, which was seem largely absent in Punjab.

Taken together, the push factors highlight how Punjabi female migration cannot be reduced to a single explanation. Instead, it reflects a multi-layered dynamic, where economic stagnation, social pressures, perceived governance failure and gendered inequalities collectively push young females to seek opportunities abroad. Migration, in this context, becomes both a necessity and a choice- a strategy to overcome systematic limitation at home and to pursue dignity, autonomy, and a self-defined future abroad.

While the push factors highlight the structural challenges and socio-cultural constraints in Punjab that motivates young females to leave, it is equally important to examine the pull factors-the opportunities that make Canada a preferred destination for higher education and settlement.

Pull Factors of Migration

i. Work Opportunities and Higher Wages

A major attraction cited by 82% of the respondents was the availability of work opportunities during and after studies. For many female migrants, the ability to work legally up to 20 hours per week while studying, along with the possibility of full-time employment after completion of studies, form the economic backbone of their migration strategy.

“In Punjab, even full-time jobs don't pay enough. In Canada, I can study and support myself too. Sometimes, even I send money back home or send gifts to my family.” – Female respondent, 21-year-old.

According to de Haas (2021), the concept of “migration capabilities” includes access to resources-economic, social, and informational-that makes migration feasible. For most, the promise of part-time jobs and post-study work permits becomes a critical capability that turns aspiration into action.

Additionally, respondents mentioned part-time jobs in restaurants, warehouses and retail sectors. While such jobs are often viewed in Punjab as low-status and poorly paid, particularly for females, these jobs are highly valued in Canada for their role in supporting daily life and repaying educational loans. Moreover, females are not limited to a specific scope of work, as they enjoy equal work opportunities to their male peer across all fields of work. Few of them reported working in trucking sector with full dignity, which was unimaginable in Punjab.

“My cousin paid her full tuition from part-time work. I am doing the same to avoid burdening my family” – Female respondent, 19-year-old.

This mirrors findings by Massey et al. (1993) and Montgomery (2010) that migration networks not only provide emotional and logistical support, but also share practical knowledge about job opportunities, enabling smoother transitions for new migrants.

ii. Pathway to Permanent Residency and Citizenship

The most frequently cited pull factors, mentioned by 77% of the respondents, was the clear and attainable pathway to Permanent Residency (PR) and eventually to the Citizenship offered by Canada. Unlike countries such as U.S. or U.K., which have restrictive and uncertain immigration pathways, Canada has developed structured programs – such as Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP), Canadian Experience Class, and Provincial Nominee Programs – that allow international students to transition smoothly from study permits to permanent settlement.

“I don’t want to return. My goal is to settle permanently – and Canada allows that through PR.” – Female respondent, 23-year-old.

This reflects what Shachar and Hirschl (2013) term as the “marketization of citizenship”, where governments use residency and citizenship policies as tools to attract global talents. For Punjabi youth, the desire to migrate is closely tied to long-term stability, not temporary education. Many interviewees noted that acquiring PR unlocks benefits such as healthcare, family reunification, social inclusion, and job stability – all of which are perceived as distant dreams in their home states.

“If I get PR, I’ll bring my parents too. It’s not just for me-it’s for my family future.”

– Female respondent, 22-year-old.

This aligns with Sharma and Peng (2025), who observe that among Punjabi aspirants, migration is not an individual journey but a family project – where settlement is settlement is essential to generational upliftment.

iii. High Standard of Living

For 72% of respondents, the perception of a higher standard of living in Canada was a decisive pull factor. The idea of accessing better infrastructure, healthcare, transport, clean environment, and a more dignified daily life strongly influenced the migration aspirations of female students.

“Even doing a small job in Canada, you can live a life with dignity. But back at home, even educated people are struggling” – Female respondent, 22-year-old.

This aligns with Salazar (2011), who argues how “cultural imaginaries” of the West shape youth aspirations through media, relative, and social networks, often overemphasises the contrast between life in the home and host country. For females in particular, the idea of high standard of living also meant less domestic labour, access to public transport, and greater social respect, even when working in modest roles.

“In Punjab, women spend half the day doing housework because there is no support. In Canada, with appliance, and equality, you actually get time to live for

yourself. My husband and I both work outside, but at home he also shares responsibilities. That kind of respect and balance is not there in my family in Punjab.” – Female respondent, 27-year-old.

This perception makes Canada not just a place of work or study but a dreamed lifestyle destination-one that embodies success, stability, and upwards social mobility.

iv. Desire for Independence and New Life Experiences

A significant proportion of the respondents emphasized the pursuit of independence, personal freedom, and new life experiences as a central pull factor motivating their migration to Canada. While 71% explicitly identified independence as their primary goal, another 60% highlighted the desire for new experiences beyond economic or educational motivations. Together, these findings underscore that migration is not only a strategy for material mobility but also project of self-transformation and identity formation.

As one 20-year-old respondent explained: *“I always wanted to experience something new- new people, cultures, freedom. I never wanted to spend my whole life in one place.”* Another 23-year-old also echoed this sentiment, *“In India, there are many restrictions, especially for girls. But in abroad we can live our lives on our own terms.”* This aligns with Gardner and Osella’s (2003) argument that south Asian youth often view migration as a pursuit of modernity. Similarly, Upadhy and Rutten (2012) highlight that migration works as a project of transformation, while Nugin (2014) frames it as a forward-looking journey where one shapes themselves through global exposure.

In sum, the aspiration for independence and new life experiences highlights the identity-driven dimensions of migration, particularly for females.

v. Canada’s Reputation as a Safe, Tolerant Society

With 68% of respondents identifying safety and social tolerance as a key pull factor, Canada's global image as an inclusive, secure, and progressive nation emerges as a powerful attraction for students. For female students, safety was not just about protection from crime, but also about freedom of movement, social acceptance, and the ability to live without constant fear of judgement.

One respondent 23-year-old, now studying in Toronto, reflected: *"In Canada, I can walk freely, day or night. Back in Punjab, I never went outside alone after sunset."* Another explained: *"Here, no one stares or questions why I'm out. In Punjab, every outing felt like surveillance- by neighbours, relatives, even stranger."*

Such comparisons reveal how migration is perceived and experienced as a shift from restriction to liberation. Feeling to feel safe is deeply gendered in this context, while males in Punjab may experience less constraints, women describe safety in Canada related to dignity, equality and confidence. It mirrors to study of Silvey (2004) and Montgomery (2010), which argue that international migration is significantly shaped by perceptions of the host country's liberal values and human rights standards. This aligns with Canada's better gender equality policies, multiculturalism and global reputation for tolerance. As one 22-year-old respondent noted:

"In Punjab, society always judges but here in Canada I am accepted as I am. I have never faced any judgement about my work, my skin tone or how I spend time with my friends."

In line with de Haas (2021) this factor reflects imagined capabilities along with structural opportunities. For Punjabi female students, Canada does not merely represent a safety, it also brings out Liberation. It imparts ability to move independently, express freely, and to live with dignity all the times.

- vi. Education quality in Canada

For 67% of respondents, Canada's reputation for high-quality, globally recognized education played a pivotal role in shaping their migration decisions. Canadian education model provides transformational learning environment, where creativity is fostered, practical skills are imparted and provides direct employment pathways. Multicultural exposure also improves interpersonal relations and brings out sense of tolerance in educational institutes.

Education in Canada is also linked with better career opportunities and upward mobility. Most of the institutions offers industry integrated courses, job placements and directly lead to employment or Permanent residency. These finding are also supported by research of Montgomery (2010) and Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase (2008), which highlights that international education is viewed as investment into global citizenship, career readiness and act a stepping stone in long term settlement in a developed nation. For Punjabi Female students, international education is also a tool to gain social independence and access modern society, which they lack in their traditional hometown society.

The pull factors identified in this study show that Canada attracts Punjabi female students not only because of its strong education system but also because it offers a pathway to long-term settlement and security. For many Punjabi female students, it represents a country where life can be lived with dignity, stability, and freedom. In this way, Canada stands out as both a practical and symbolic destination. The pull factors of Canada, therefore, rests on the mix of real opportunities and imagined possibilities, making it the first choice for Punjabi female students who want and who are creating their new futures for themselves and their families.

Interaction of Push and Pull Factors

The finding of this study male clear that migration is not driven by push or pull factors alone, but by the way the two interact in shaping choices. The push factors in Punjab -such as unemployment, peer pressure, gender inequality, agrarian distress, and governance failures-

creates a strong sense of frustration and hopelessness among young females and their families. These conditions generate the desire to leave and make staying in Punjab unviable. At the same time, the pull factors in Canada- clear pathways to permanent residency, safety, independence, high living standards, and a tolerant society-provide a convincing alternative and a vision of what life could be. For many respondents, family members, encouraged migration because they saw no future in Punjab, while imaging Canada as a place where their daughters' hard work would be respected. Migration, therefore, emerges from the meeting point of push and pull dynamics: the lack of opportunities combines with the promise of security, freedom, and modernity abroad.

V. Conclusion

The study highlights that Punjabi female student migration to Canada is not simply a matter of educational choice, but the outcome of a deeper interaction between structural push pressures at home and aspirational pull attractions abroad. Push factors such as unemployment, agrarian distress, and gender inequality have created a climate of insecurity and hopelessness, making opportunities at home country increasingly unviable. At the same time, Canada offers a powerful alternative through accessible education, pathways to permanent residency, safety, gender equality, and higher standards of living.

What emerges from this interaction is a migration process that is both economic and symbolic. Economically, it represents a strategy for upward mobility and family security, often supported by parents who see migration as a better investment than dowry or unstable jobs. Symbolically, it reflects a generational and gendered aspiration for freedom, dignity, and modernity-values that many young females feel are unattainable within Punjab's restrictive environment.

In this sense, Punjabi female student migration to Canada can be understood not only as a response to the limited opportunities at home, but also as an active re-imagining of life

possibilities abroad. The study, therefore contributes to broader discussion on how gender, education, and global mobility intersect to reshape youth aspirations.

VI. Limitation and Future Scope

This study is limited by its relatively small sample of 110 respondents and 10 interviews, which may not fully represent all Punjabi female students in Canada. The reliance on self-reported data also means that findings reflect personnel perceptions rather than measurable outcomes. In addition, the study focused only on female students migrating to Canada, leaving out comparisons with male migrants or students moving to other countries.

Future research could address these gaps by using larger more diverse samples and by including both male and female students for a fuller gendered analysis. Longitudinal studies would help trace how many migration aspirations and outcomes evolve over time, while comparative work across regions and host countries could highlight differences shaped by policy and culture across various countries. Exploring the influence of digital media and migration consultancy networks would also provide valuable insights into how student migration ideas are formed.

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