

**RESEARCH PAPER****Upward Social Mobility through Migration: An Ethnographic Study of Trends in Pakistan****<sup>1</sup>Faiz Rasool \*, <sup>2</sup> Dr. Muhammad Ilyas Bhatti and <sup>3</sup>Dr. Muhammad Rahmatullah Farooqi**

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**\*Corresponding Author** [frasool@anth.qau.edu.pk](mailto:frasool@anth.qau.edu.pk)**ABSTRACT**

Current study highlighted the use of remittances for a higher stable social group which influence the natives, and also initiated by transnational migrant households. Migration is the key to a stable survival strategy which benefited the left-behind families. The data was extracted from PhD research work carried out from 2018 to 2021, in district Mandi Bahauddin. Criterion and stratified purposive sampling techniques were used for the selection of respondents, 29 household heads were interviewed for the current study. In-depth interviews were thematically analysed. Study highlighted remittances were bearing the expense of day-to-day activities, and also used for accumulation of more economic resources, which is highly significant in social upward mobility. Migrant families enjoyed a high social status which represented through a local group **ٺٺ** that is amalgamation of caste and class based traits. Migration is the significant reason of social stability among respondents in selected area.

**Keywords:** Investment, Migration, Remittances, Social Mobility**Introduction**

Economic stability is commonly observed as the central part in the social and cultural lives of the people. Migration is one of the important factors that helps to sustain livelihood in developing countries (McDowell & de Haan, 1997). Generally, various definition of social mobility provides a higher range of its utility from parallel to upward mobility, from inter-generational to intra-generational (McKenna, 2004), but change in socioeconomic status remained the same (Galiani, 2007). Socioeconomic upward mobility through migration is the central point of the current study. It refers to the occupational development and change in social stratification (Joslyn, 1927). The concept of social mobility and social stratification was elaborated by Pitirim Soroken (see 1927) as 'social mobility is a change in the social status for an individual or the community over time.' Social mobility is the movement either up or down within various social hierarchies such as income, wealth, occupation and education (1927, 1959). Migration is a tool of socio-economic development (Handler, 2018; Morina et al., 2015; Taylor, 2006). Income and expenditure on daily activities i.e. education, kitchen expenses, and social affairs were discussed along with various investment methods for the accumulation of resources in the present study. All the stated four factors were discussed to understand the development over time.

Expenses on household, business, educational and social development were preferably narrated to measure the upward social mobility in the selected transnational migrant households (Rasool, 2023). Income inequalities pushed individuals to migrate to those countries that have more stable economic opportunities (Davies & Wooton, 1992). It was evident with the passage of time, that sending back remittances to middle or lower-

income countries from high-income countries increased (Connor et al., 2013) which not only strengthened livelihood but also enhanced the purchasing capacity of the left behind families (Ahmed et al., 2010). Remittance consumption for the family's well-being is a commonly practiced phenomenon in developing countries (Ahmed et al., 2010). Most of the remittances were used on the expenses of households for a sustainable livelihood to reduce poverty and increase social status (Awan et al., 2017), and for the accumulation of resources (Fatima & Qayyum, 2016). Education is recognized as the progressive catalyst for upward mobility which not only provides necessary skills to individuals but also more opportunities for an improved socioeconomic status (Katsillis & Armer, 2023; Mian, 2023). Income mobility usually refers to transitions between income classes, while social mobility refers to the extent of changes of individual, household, or group's social status in a social hierarchy or stratification. Overall, this article aims to highlight the characteristics of social mobility and how it evolved through changes in per month income and expense of the transnational households. Upward social mobility is directly linked to the high status in the current study area; it also shadowed the social caste that is the usual identification process in the rural communities.

### Literature Review

The concept of social mobility is discussed in two ways i.e. self and societal mobility (Day & Fiske, 2019). Personal social mobility refers to one's own chances of social class change, whereas societal social mobility talks about the chances that a group of people have in general to move up or down. Some of the studies highlighted that personal and societal social mobility are positively related (Alesina et al., 2018; Day & Fiske, 2017). In the current study, a change in societal mobility through personal mobility was observed which established a group of international migrants (Rasool, 2023). Income-based social mobility was a prominent part of the current study and remittances were considered the tool for such enhanced growth. With respect to remittances, developing countries' remittances increased from 1.2% of (GDP) in 1990 to 1.8% in 2007 (Ahmed et al., 2010). It was also documented that in 2007 approximately 65% of the remittance was received by middle-income and 10% by low-income countries (Ahmed et al., 2010). The share of remittances was 90% at the macro level which was the foreign direct investment that outnumbered the official capital flows in Latin America (Acosta et al., 2008). Remittances not only helped in smooth consumption but also reduced poverty. According to the report published by the State Bank of Pakistan, Pakistan received US \$258.3 billion as remittances till 2019 which is higher than US\$ 47.4 billion of foreign direct investment (Ellahi & Omer, 2021). The report also highlighted that such bulk is not part of any national or regional development. Migrants send remittances directly to their families which are used for basic necessities, and lift a large number of people out of poverty.

Various studies (Cuong & Linh, 2018; ETOWA et al., 2014; Koc & Onan, 2004; Wagle & Devkota, 2018) examined the effects of remittances on welfare, in the current study the effects of remittances extended to the upward social mobility of recipients. It not only provides social protection but also well-being to the household (Brown et al., 2013). Brown indicated that sometimes remittances are blamed for wasteful consumption in native areas which not only discourages the working efforts among recipients but also the unproductive expenditure in the real estate sector (Chami et al., 2005). Remittances are the surplus of foreign amount which were send back to the left behind families for their social protection (Brown et al., 2013). In current study the investment on real estate business were considered the most important aspect for accumulation of resources (Rehman, 2014). Remittances also increase the purchasing power and helped in improving the economic security as households' well-being (Wagle & Devkota, 2018). The study of (Airola, 2007) highlighted that among Mexican migrant families, the expenses recorded low on food items, but more on the health and housing that showed a significant expenditure on necessities of households other than non-food items.

The study of (Nanziri & Mwale, 2023) highlighted the effects of remittances on the recipients in into two ways i.e. immediate and long-term. Immediate increases the total income of household which anyone can see through consumptions; on the other long-term effects further divided into three particular outcomes a) accumulation of more resources through investment, b) no change in the status and c) decrease income in long term. The immediate and investment for accumulation of more economic activities were observed in the current study. Household expenses increases, and left behind families invested remittances in real estate and other investment plans to accumulate more resources which support economic uplift. The penal data analysis of (Khan et al., 2019) light upon the role of remittances in multidimensional ways, it not positively impacted the economic growth and consumption but also the private investment. The study (Yasmeen et al., 2011) highlighted that a major portion of GDP is composed of remittances and it has positive impact on the private investment which leads to higher income. Current study discussed the economic growth as the reason of social upward mobility, so no particular emphasis have been given to the caste based social stratification of the community members which is important in South Asian countries (Chekki, 1970).

### **Material and Methods**

The data have been extracted from my PhD research work carried out from 2018 to 2021 in Mandi Bahauddin. The area is famous because of its international migration through legal and illegal channels. It is among the highest migrant sending districts to Europe besides Jehlum, Mirpur and Gujrat (PBS, 2021). The major objective of the study was to document the impact of international migration on identity construction process of families living behind. The transnational lens of identity formation was adopted. Study sample was selected with the help of criterion and stratified purposive sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015; Sahifa., 2020; Shaheen et al., 2019). Overall 65 in-depth interviews have been conducted from 29 transnational households of the selected area. Due to limited access to women under various religious, cultural and social restrictions; male version of the social upward mobility were documented and discussed here. More emphasis has been given to the emic perspective during data collection and then substitute with the etic interlinings of concepts. Thematic analysis has been done for the current study, to make the findings comprehensive and interconnected.

### **Social Mobility**

Economic transformation from low income to high-income households is the major focus of the paper. The concept of social mobility is preferably selected to measure the percentage change in social class of the households with respect to their expenses and investments to achieve higher economic growth through remittances. Economic development is the most important factor which not only helped the community to sustain their lives but also showed their wealth to gain social and cultural capital. It was also observed during interviews people consumed remittances lavishly for the construction of houses, like in the district of Mirpur, Azad Kashmir (Erdal, 2012) to maintain their social existence in the community. That is the cultural part of the study but did not discuss in detail. The ancestral household was used to strengthen and maintain the family legacy among the respondents of *Mandi* to maintain their social capital(s). International migration impacted the overall caste-based social stratification of the area, a new form of class-based stratification emerging which not only challenging previous caste-based stratification but also pushing natives to be the part of class-based stratification.

### **Social Stratification**

District Mandi Bahauddin is situated on the Northern side of Punjab province. It is agriculturally rich area, land is cultivatable and people practiced Punjabi culture (Eglar, 2010). Each culture has its unique identity which can be observed and documented through

various rules and regulations, values and normative structures that not only facilitate group members to sustain a social and cultural environment but also the interdependency of the group members. Sameness is the major concept which was used in anthropology to address the group uniqueness (Finke & Sökefeld, 2018; Sökefeld, 1999). Keeping in mind the socio-economic divided in the selected community, emergence of economic class system among migrant households as a new social stratification method was documented. This new stratification challenged the cultural normative structures, ways of living and also changed the power dynamics of the area. Economic progress was observed a supportive tool for upward social development. Generally, in South Asian countries, high social-castes have both social and cultural superiority over others due to power over natural and manmade resources. Particularly in the current area of study, caste-based groups were present; migration is the tool which not only promotes the economic independence, but also used as survival strategy by the low income community members.

Cultural aspects e.g. caste-based groups, groups on the basis of religion were not included for the present research study; they were the prominent social determinants but not influential in the current study. The area is agrarian but due to massive international migration now the dependency on the agrarian system switched with the modern ways and tactics of economic gain i.e. investment in real estate businesses, construction business, food chains and shopping malls, establishment of rental businesses and investment in educational and social development projects were the major sources of income other than remittances observed in the selected community. Growth in economic resources was considered the major tool for upward social mobility. That not only enhances the living standards of the migrant families but also strengthen their economic status in the community.

### Emerging Class-Based Grouping

In the city centers of Mandi Bahauddin, the number of service and entrepreneurial business are increasing, from the whole sample size the engagement of the respondents in the business related investments are shared in the table below;

**Table 1**  
**Percentage Increase in the Businesses after Migration**

Sr. No.	Professional Engagements	Number of households	% increase	
			Before	After
1	Real Estate Investors	14	00	78
2	Real Estate Builders	11	35	69
3	Entrepreneurial Businesses	19	10	11
4	International Money Exchange Dealers	17	35	80
5	Fast Food Points	15	00	30
6	Branded Cloths' Boutiques	20	10	45
7	Investment in housing societies	15	00	65
8	Investment in the Educational Sector	07	05	25
9	Investment in the Health Sector	06	05	45

Stated table highlighted the overall percentage involvement of each transnational household in the investment purposes for economic sustainability. It was observed during interviews, after two years of the migration, migrant families initiated the investment patterns and used remittances for accumulation of more economic resources. A respondent shared,

'After the migration of my brother, now our economic situation is more stable.'

Another respondent re-present the current state,

'We had limited resources, most of the time we looked to relatives for our monthly expenses, by the grace of God, my brother managed to visit England (how he reached there and which type of hurdles we faced during that time is another story), he lived in hideouts but sending us monthly income which was consuming on a day to day expenses. Now, from last three years we are able to invest in real estate business that is very profitable nowadays in *Mandi*.'

Table one shows 78% increase in the number of real estate investors after migration. Real estate business was flourishing business of the area and majority of the migrant families invested their remittances in this growing sector. Purchasing of residential and commercial plots for re-sealing purposes, construction of houses and selling, re-selling, rental services were commonly documented income generating activities. A respondent shared,

'Though rental services are limited, it is not a big city like Islamabad or Lahore, but the numbers of residential colonies are extensively increasing. People usually have their ancestral houses for a living but in cities they construct a new residential unit to showcase their economically stable background.'

Another respondent interprets to some extent the same narration as,

'In newly developed colonies of the city, no one can say or access with surety about the belongings of the residents. Though inter-district migration is limited, no one can surly say anything about the new settlers and their caste. Everyone has lavish houses and luxury cars; it look in the residential colonies everyone belonged to higher social castes.'

The key informant of the study elaborated on such phenomena as,

'In newly developed residential colonies highly lavish houses are owned by migrant families, I know various families who changed their social caste just because now they have income equal to the high caste of the area; and this is glittering of sterling pounds.'

The majority of the shopping malls are situated in the central part of the city. The ever mega mall 'Al Asr The mall of Mandi Bahauddin,' in under construction and renovation, 45% of the respondents purchased shops for rental purposes in the mall. Various entrepreneurial businesses were enlisted during interviews, services related to IT and software fields, and online stores of shoes, cloths, and books etc. household appliances stores, and consultation services for the natives who seek migration were documented as the sources of additional income among the respondents. Due to the high migration intensity, traveling and ticketing agencies are on the rise. Those who experience one international trip to the UK are considered suitable franchisees in the traveling sector. A respondent highlighted,

'Traveling business is the most secure business in the area, because you are just providing services to the customers. Money circulated through travel agents but not a single rupee belonged to the agent. That is why if there are delays in the flights or people want to get any favors they additionally pay for it and there is no chance of personal lose.'

Along with the traveling sector, International Money Exchange Dealership is the second increasing entrepreneurial business in the area. It provides a stable economic source to the investor which is why among the migrant families a 45% increase in this business was recorded. It was also found that all the stated businesses were owned by migrant families. Money exchange is to some extent risky task, as per the owner of a Union pay franchise,

'The more the income the more the social evils; in the district overall number of thefts and robbery incidents have increased in recent years due to the huge economic

differences; people did not bother to report it which is why the number of registered robberies and theft is limited. Lack of trust in police or other law enforcement agencies is the major reason for such low complaints.'

The business of cloths and fast food exponentially increased in last one decade every clothing brand (stitched or unstitched) have their outlet in Mandi Bahauddin. Natives used to shop and the trend of 'shopping malls' also increasing which reshaped the agrarian city into a modern architectural business hub. Food courts are increasing and the fusion of traditional and modern eatables attracted more customers. Local food points inside the old city residential areas, old markets, at the bank of river and canals, were overly booked in the evening which not only showed the out-going practices of the community but also the purchasing power. The trend of hoteling gradually increasing, for various culture and social reasons, a respondent shared,

'People of the area belonged to Punjabi origin which is why they are foodie. Local food points are overburdened; over population due to rural-urban migration and demographic increase pushed the food courts to increase their productivity and sitting arrangements. This increase generated a gap that was filled by fast food setups for example pizza huts, fried wings' points, and other chicken related food points in the city. Every month a new name is added on social and electronic media with new deals they offered to grab the customers. Fast food business is increasing because people are loved to eat and this hoteling is actually showing their economic stability.'

The same was happening with the clothing segment of the city. An average 35% increase was recorded in the clothing sector of the area by the respondents. Regular shops turned into shopping malls, boutiques, hand carts turned into shops and shops into shopping malls. A respondent shared,

'You cannot imagine how the city changed its looks during the Mushraf time. I have seen overnight developments when people were investing in the construction and shopping sectors. The concept of fast food and shopping malls was started in his time.'

Structural development directly impacted the agrarian values of the city. More natives got involved in the construction and business sectors and left their ancestral profession of agriculture. A respondent shared,

'Agriculture is the backbone of the country but right now the country is bedridden. No one wanted to invest in the agriculture sector due to various reasons i.e. fluctuation of fuel prices, higher rates of seeds, costly fertilizers and very cheap selling price of the agricultural products are some of them. That is why selling land for residential colonies is the good opportunity farmers are cashing nowadays.'

The selected sample size showed an increase of 65% in the housing sector in the last three years. The city is surrounded by various residential colonies and the phenomenon of acquiring land for residential colonies is increasing. The availability of personal transportation vehicles made it easy for the inhabitants to set a residential unit far from the city centers. The agricultural land of the surrounding areas is turning into residential colonies that overburden the civic services provided by the Mandi Bahauddin municipality. Educational and Health sectors are emerging sectors; migrant families owned various hospitals (40% increases) in the city, and a number of educational institution chains (20% increase) were run by migrant families is an additional economic resource. It is a profitable business, a respondent narrated,

'The educational rate is higher in our area; you can find the highest number of lawyers and Judges who belong to *Mandi* District. The population is increasing and the government facilities are not good enough to provide educational facilities to all the citizens.

This gap of services is filled by privately owned schools and colleges. Some of the pious and humanitarian people lunched various chains of schools and colleges for the educational development of children in the Punjab province all the chained trust schools and colleges' franchises are present in the district. Providing learning services is a noble cause and has economic benefits too.'

The majority of the health facility centers were situated at *Kachehri* and *Phalia* road; three private hospitals were owned by the respondents of the study. A respondent shared,

'The building of the hospital was constructed on the directions of my father, he was the general surgeon in the district hospital, all the investment was made by my elder brothers and two years after my father's death, the building was completed. We all agreeably established the hospital in the memory of my late father and acquired services of doctors and paramedical staff.'

Expenses and the living standards of the families were considered one of the important methods for document the economic development of families. The overall kitchen expenses, expense for Education and health were collected keeping in mind the percentage increase or decrease before and after migration of the family members from selected households.

**Table 2**  
**Expenses of Families before and After Migration**

Sr. No.	Expenses	Number of households	Per Month Expense (PKR)	
			Before	After
01	Kitchen Expenses	10	15,000-25,000	35,000-45,000
		06	25,000-35,000	55,000-65,000
		05	35,000-45,000	60,000-70,000
		08	45,000-55,000	130,000-150,000
02	Expenses on Health Care	05	5000-10,000	
		07	10,000-15,000	10,000-15,000
		06	15,000-20,000	15,000-20,000
		01	20,000-25,000	35,000-40,000
		03	25,000-30,000	40,000-45,000
03	Expense on Educational Development	02	30,000-35,000	60,000-65000
		09	5000-10,000	25,000-30,000
		09	10,000-15,000	35,000-40,000
		04	15,000-20,000	
04	Expenses on Social Events	05	20,000-25000	50,000-55,000
		12	10,000-15,000	20,000-25,000
		10	15,000-20,000	25,000-30,000
		03	25,000-30,000	30,000-35,000

Above table 2 provides compact information on the monthly expenses of transnational migrant households. The table was formulated from in-depth interviews to make the reader understand how much differences every household possesses after migration. It is asserted that an increase in the monthly income could be seen through monthly expenses as well. Overall family's expenses were distributed into two segments before and after migration and the underlying rubrics had particular aspects of social development. In first portion of the table kitchen expenses which includes breakfast, lunch, dinner and suppers along with eatables provided to the guests were documented. Generally, kitchen expenses are more than other utility bills, when asked to the respondents 'why kitchen expenses consumed a significant portion of the remittances/income? A respondent stated,

'Kitchen expenses of Punjabi families are higher, the higher the income the larger the table, very limited families compromised on the kitchen expenses.'

Another respondent supported the argument as,

'Punjabis are food lovers, they cut down other expenses but the kitchen expenses remain the same and occasionally rise from the actual one.'

High expenses are associated with high social class. Those who are living lavish lives spend more on their guests. A respondent shared,

'Serving guests appropriately increases your honor and prestige in the society. It is also the religious saying, 'you must enlarge your dinner table I (Almighty) will make it huge. Expensing more on the relatives and guests also endorsed the high living standards.'

Overall, 24 families were spending on the health of the family members. No prolonged sickness was recorded during interviews, some of the contagious diseases i.e. cold; flu and temperature were commonly observed. Children under the age of 18 were more prone to various allergies; elderly individuals in the selected families and children were the main consumers of health services. The general percentage increased in health was recorded higher in 06 families. It was also documented that people have different connotations towards health facility centers, 'if you have money you must go to Islamabad or Lahore for the health checkups' was common and extensively used verbatim during the whole data collection process. A respondent shared,

'Health status is the second priority of the community members because it is very rare if you ever listen to someone who is not feeling well.'

The said statement does not show the health conditions of the people but the association of health with the well-being of the respondents. When the above statement was asked why people did not discuss their health conditions openly? Key informant narrated,

'People did not share their health conditions with everyone because it looked unpleasant if you were sick and sitting with the healthy one, people usually avoid sick persons that is why it is not openly discussed in daily routine matters. And another thing, health issues related to the low-income and poor people could be the reason people did not share.'

Sick people were not much appreciated in the community, there were some diseases associated with the economic condition of the individuals i.e. heart disease considered the disease of the rich, tension and depression also the disease of the rich and business persons. Natives avoid sharing health profiles to keep people an arm's length.

From the whole sample size 27 families showed a positive development to the educational status of the left-behind family members. It was also documented that migrant families send their children to good private schools and colleges for two major purposes i.e. to maintain the class structure and development of their children for upcoming future migration to the UK. As discussed earlier, migrant families invest more in business sectors as an alternative source of economic resources, and spending on education is also considered a long-term investment for the future's economic stability. Six families owned different private colleges which not only stabilized their economic conditions but also was the reason for the educational divide in society. The key informant of the study shared,

'Education is the key to success, that is why enrollment rate of the children in our district is higher and we have very good schools and colleges in general as well as technical



education. The establishment of private schools and colleges enhanced the gap between rich and common.'

The last segment of the monthly expenses was the monthly expenses on social occasions, and events. Only 25 families shared their expenses before and after migration which were 10 to 15% higher than the previous one. No one actually remembers the exact amount of the events because such events were served lavishly. A respondent shared,

'Social gatherings are the source of inspiration and developing connections, so we consume more on such occasions; because the expenses come along various benefits that facilitated in the near and far future.'

It was also documented having money and showing off the economic status are two different inter-related essential features of the selected community. If you have money and an economically stable status, it is the proposed moral responsibility to show off to others. A respondent narrated,

'If you have the money; using lavish cars, live in western architectural houses, have sparkling (کراکری) kitchen utensils and high standard parties is the indispensable traits of it. If you are not practicing anything in the same manner no one will acknowledge your wealthy status and social acceptance as an economically stable individual.'

Living standards i.e. number of rooms; mobility vehicle, residential units etc. and modern household equipment were some of the features enlisted during interviews. Standardized living condition has a local definition, 'those who are present in every social or cultural events/gatherings have enough money to support the events and people around them were considered the wealthy persons.' Keeping in mind the same definition; a question was asked to the respondents 'why showing off wealth is important rather than investing in other social activities for the development of community? A respondent shared,

'It is very unfortunate you are talking like this nonsense, people earn money for their own survival and superiority and showing off is not working like that you are thinking. It is the necessity to maintain the family legacy. Superiority is like dope, it is a power and if you don't have it you don't understand it.'

## Conclusion

The study concluded that remittances have been used for accumulation of income generating activities. Economic stability is not the only function of remittances but also a staircase to upward economic class. Economic class is the new stratification of the current study area which was endorsed by the transitional migrant households through their investment and increasing gap between migrant and non-migrant households. In-depth interviews and participant observations highlighted the emergence of a local term for migrant households as '(بہاری) Baharly' (Rasool, 2023), a group which has dual traits of caste and class based stratification. The term is commonly practiced in Jehlum, Gujrat and Mandi Bahauddin districts. From each household the interviews of household head were included for the current study because they have the authority over all economic affairs. Table one discussed an overall increase in the private investment after the migration which were also explored in the studies of (Akter, 2016; Griffith et al., 2008) another study highlighted the organized investment of remittances in private investment (Ojapinwa & Odekunle, 2013). Study concluded that the transnational migrant households initiated parallel economic resources on the investment of remittances. Economic capital is the key to social and economic progress (Kapur, 2022). Entrepreneurial businesses, short-term and long-term investments needed capital for accumulation of resources and utilization of personal capabilities to progress. People of the under developed and developing countries like

Pakistan scarce the capital that is why migration to the developed and high income countries were observed. Such development in first is the source of survival but latter on dependency of the left behind families (Koc & Onan, 2004). In the current study this dependency is substituting with the local investment methods that considered more stable among the respondents. However, the dependency on the remittances and the migrant family members still prevail in the selected community but the intensity becoming low.

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