

## Illegal Emigration from Haryana: A Study Based on "Dunki" movie and recent Deportation Events

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### Abstract

Emigration as a phenomenon has been persistent in the north Indian states of Punjab and Haryana recently due to the various push and pull factors ranging from unemployment to a better quality of life abroad. Recent deportation events, including large-scale removals of Indian nationals from the United States, have brought renewed attention to the consequences of illegal migration. This paper examines the intersection of cinematic representation and real-world migration trends, focusing on Haryana, where illegal emigration is a growing concern. It explores socio-economic drivers, the role of human trafficking networks, policy implications, and reintegration challenges faced by deportees. This study provides a mix of academic research, policy reports, and current news coverage.

**Key words:** Illegal Emigration, Haryana, Dunki, Deportation, irregular migration

## Introduction

Migration is a global phenomenon shaped by economic, political, and social forces of both the source and destination countries. Human history is the history of migration as the man has travelled to various geographical locations in the search of food, shelter and other necessities of life. The desperation to change one's life circumstances sometimes leads to even illegal emigration or irregular migration or clandestine migration which is popularly called '*dunki*' route of migration in northern states of Punjab and Haryana in India. Haryana has witnessed a significant emigration of its youth in recent years and many of them take unauthorized routes in pursuit of better employment opportunities and improved quality of life. While some of them succeed many others face deportation, detention, or even life-threatening situations highlighting the human cost of illegal migration route.

The use of '*dunki*' route has been rapidly exploited in the recent years for emigrating to the United States of America. As it observed by fivefold increase of 97000 illegal Indian migrants entering there compared to the 20000 from last year due to the improved and sophisticated techniques of smugglers after the pandemic coupled with extreme visa backlogs (Venkatraman, 2023). The policy changes regarding entry of immigrants have changed drastically over the few years across the globe and this has led to increase in irregular migration from desperate people escaping their source countries for various political and economic reasons. As rightly quoted by great Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray "Cinema is the mirror of society" the contemporary social issue-based films provide visual representation of the events through story telling. In December 2023, when illegal migration from India was on peak, director Rajkumar Hirani came up with a film based upon true story irregular migration named as '*Dunki*'

starring Shahrukh Khan, Taapsee Pannu, Boman Irani and Vicky Kaushal. The sequence of events in the film somehow depicts the reality of every illegal immigrant from Haryana. In the backdrop of current incidents of deportation, analysis of this film gives wider understanding of this phenomenon from multiple perspectives.

### **Methodology**

This paper utilises secondary data available on irregular migration from India using various reports available in public domain, from the mass media and movies, news reports, research papers and books available on the issue. The study reviews various peer reviewed and Scopus indexed journals from the database of google scholar, springer, research gate etc. to understand the causes and implications of illegal immigration along with the information on deportation released by governments across the world. The study is based upon the subordinate data and existing literature present on the issue. In the process of review keywords like “irregular migration”, “dunki route”, “illegal border crossing” and “deportation of Indians” etc were searched in context of Haryana on above mentioned data bases. Apart from that, the film analysis of movie ‘dunki’ released in 2023 directed by Rajkumar Hirani was done to understand certain aspects of this phenomenon through the cinematic lens.

### **Recent Deportation Incidents:**

This year United states of America has deported Indians who came there via the Dunki route and crossed border illegally highlighting change in their migration policies. On February 5, 2025 a military plane deported 104 Indian illegal

migrants followed by another deportation flight on February 15 that included 119 individuals out of which 33 are from Haryana (Bureau, 2025).

**Table-1**

*Deportation statistics of February 2025*

S. No.	State	No. of People deported
1.	Punjab	67
2.	Haryana	33
3.	Gujarat	8
4.	Uttar Pradesh	3
5.	Goa	2
6.	Maharashtra	2
7.	Rajasthan	2
8.	Himachal Pradesh	1
9.	Jammu & Kashmir	1

These events of deportations and many others of such kind showcase the U.S. administration's stringent measures employed against illegal immigration and have significant implications for the affected individuals, their home states and country. On the one hand it brings humiliation to India on global stage and on the other it shows the desperation of citizens to leave their country through any means possible. In response to these developments, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed readiness to repatriate Indian nationals living illegally in the U.S. He emphasized that individuals who enter a country illegally do not have the right to stay, aligning India's stance with that of the U.S administration. These events have prompted Indian authorities to scrutinize

human trafficking networks that facilitate illegal migration. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) initiated investigations into at least 4,300 Indians suspected of having unlawfully entered the U.S. between 2021 and 2024 as a part of probe against illegal human trafficking (Tiwary, 2025). Later in a response to the question asked by member of parliament, the ministry of external affairs gave details of deportees in Lok Sabha on 1<sup>st</sup> august 2025. There were 1703 Indians deported from 20<sup>th</sup> January to 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2025 out of which 1562 were men and 141 were women (Affairs, 2025).

**Table-2**

***Deportation statics of August 2025***

State/UT	Number of Deportees
Punjab	620
Haryana	604
Gujarat	245
Uttar Pradesh	38
Goa	26
Maharashtra	20
Delhi	20
Telangana	19

State/UT	Number of Deportees
Tamil Nadu	17
Andhra Pradesh	12
Uttarakhand	12
Himachal Pradesh	10
Jammu & Kashmir	10
Kerala	8
Chandigarh	8
Madhya Pradesh	7
Rajasthan	7
West Bengal	6
Karnataka	5
Odisha	1
Bihar	1
Jharkhand	1
Unknown	6

*Source-MEA, India*

Similar to the previous table of February Punjab and Haryana consistently contribute for over 70% of illegal migrants who got deported highlighting the socio-economic conditions favouring emigration in the region. The administration of united states has implemented stringent measures against illegal immigration and has also reduced the scope of legal immigration ever since president Donald trump assumed the office and articulated his stance on the issue. The illegal migrants have been deported through various channels given in the table below.

**Table-3 Channels of deportation**

<b>Mode / Type of flight</b>	<b>Number of deportees</b>
US Customs & Border Protection (CBP) / “military” flights (Feb 5, 15, 16)	333
ICE Enforcement & Removal Operations charter flights (Mar 19, Jun 8, 25)	231
Department of Homeland Security (DHS) charter flights (Jul 5, 18)	300
Commercial flights from Panama (individuals/small groups)	72
Commercial flights from the US (individuals/small groups)	767
<b>Total (till 22 July 2025)</b>	<b>1,703</b>

*Source-* (Affairs, 2025)

India has aligned its stance with United states and has helped U.S administration to curb illegal migration by providing background checks and helped in identifying the nationality of deportees. The official spokesperson of ministry of external affairs has reiterated India's policy of promoting legal migration by taking back deportees after verifying through proper documentation and cracking down on illegal human trafficking networks (ANI, 2025). These efforts by both governments have resulted in a steep decline in attempt to cross U.S border illegally by Indians, only 34,146 Indians are detained by U.S authorities this year as compared to 90,415 detained in last year. Overall, 2790 Indians have been deported by the U.S through various channels by the end of October 2025 (Trivedi, 2025). Similarly Canadian government has also followed the suit by appointing 1000 new officers in their border services agency for effectively controlling the border crossings and enacting laws that could enable the agency to deport the migrants at mass scale.

**Table-4**

*Number of Indians Removed by Canadian border agency (2019-2025)*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Indians Removed</b>
2019	625
2020	1,424
2021	602
2022	784

Year	Number of Indians Removed
2023	1,130
2024	1,997
2025	2,831

*Source-* (CBSA, 2025)

As shown in Table 4, number of Indians trying to enter Canada illegally are increasing constantly for the past five years with exception of decline in 2020-2021, when the Covid-19 pandemic had halted travelling across the globe. Indians form the second largest group of illegal migrants in Canada after the Mexicans (CBSA, 2025). Similarly United Kingdom has 2715 Indians in their detention centre as of August 2025. Through newly implemented UK-France border treaty allowing Britain to send back migrants trying to cross English Channel illegally, the first person to be deported under it has been turned out to be an Indian. On the same time Indians using 'dunki' route to reach UK has doubled from last year with an increase of 108 per cent (Desk, 2025), possibly due to strict measures being taken at American border Britain is appearing as an alternative destination. Moreover the Indians that are deported are unaware about the schemes of French welfare system, which provides certain social rights like healthcare to every human on French territory including illegal immigrants but since they lack knowledge of French language they live on streets like a homeless person after deportation from Britain (Kirpalani, Moliner, & Muhammad, 2016).

These recent events of deportation have brought the attention towards cracks and faults in policy making in India. On the one hand India has become the fourth largest economy and on the other hand some of its citizens desperately wish to reach developed countries through any means possible. These mass deportation events bring illegal human trafficking networks in light and the reasons for their flourishing. As the illegal immigration is getting rampant, many of the developed countries have made even legal migration very difficult by raising visa fees and selectively giving residential permits in their countries. This data on recent incidents highlights the scale and extent irregular migration sourcing out from India and the deportations done by the countries primarily ruled by right wing political parties where they get supported by the anti-immigrant groups, expressing their intention to preserve their society and economy from outside influence. The fact that mass deportations are coincided with change in political regime towards more conservative parties highlights it as being emerging political issue. The deportation of undocumented Indians has severe consequences as many of them had spent years in assimilating themselves in to a new country and culture only to be forcibly returned and now they have returned they face financial problems, social stigma, mental disturbance etc. in their own country making their reintegration very difficult. However, the government has started crackdown on agents facilitating 'Dunki' migration and human traffickers after the recent deportation but families who spent lakhs just to send their member abroad have received huge economic set back.

### **Factors driving irregular migration in Haryana:**

There are complex factors which come into play when an individual decides to cross the border illegally, the sociological reality of it boils down to a 'culture of

migration' in Punjab and Haryana that normalises the illegal border crossings. The major push factors responsible for such a high number of illegal emigrants are the unemployment, lack of dignity of labour in India and pull factor being the lucrative career opportunities abroad and aspiration for the better quality of life. These factors motivate individuals to take the course of illegal migration and take the risk of financial loss, physical and psychological trauma and the social stigma of deportation.

### **Socio-Economic Factors Driving Illegal Emigration from Haryana:**

Several factors contribute to the high rate of illegal emigration from Haryana:

- **Economic Hardships:** Despite of rapid industrialization in Haryana there are economic disparities that are persisting in northern part of Haryana where there are less industries. The phenomenon is visible particularly in rural areas where farming remains the primary livelihood and declining agricultural profitability along with the lack of alternative employment opportunities push individuals to seek jobs overseas even at the cost of selling agricultural land or taking loan on it.
- **Unemployment Among Youth:** Haryana has one of the highest unemployment rates in India. Educated but jobless youth often perceive migration as the only means to achieve financial stability and believes that their education would be rewarded much better outside India. So, they try to enter in a developed country even if it involves illegal routes and risks associated with it. Moreover, news about exam leaks, rampant corruption in job market, few vacancies for government job renders them hopeless about their future in Haryana.

- **Social Prestige and Aspiration:** In many parts of Haryana migrating to Western countries is seen as a status symbol and NRIs are perceived to be resourceful person socially. Their Families take loans or sell property to finance migration, expecting higher remittances in return or in hope of increased social prestige. The prestige earned by emigrants' forces aspiring emigrants to take the risks associated with illegal migration worthwhile (Smith, 2014). Emigrants earn tag of 'Pardesi' or foreigner normalising the illegal routes as acceptable risk for status.
- **Lack of Awareness and Misinformation:** Many migrants are unaware of legal pathways or assume unauthorized channels are the only option for going to foreign country without study visa. Unscrupulous agents exploit this ignorance by promising secure passage while putting migrants in grave danger along with holding their documents and giving forged visas and take their money. While institutionalizing illegal activity of 'dunki' migration as cultural norm.  
In a sense illegal migration is quite costly as well as forced. Where as in other countries people resort to irregular migration as it is less expensive than the regular route via nexus of social connections, travel agents and human smugglers. Owing to the lack of awareness migration has resulted in bitter experience for some people as for few of them 'dunki' route involved travelling in container ships from Mumbai to Europe (Singh, Singla, & Singh, 2024).
- **Escaping the law:** In Haryana many criminals or people accused of committing crimes have found illegal emigration as a way to escape from reach of Indian law. It's not uncommon to see news reports every single day of people fleeing country to avoid judicial implications. Later they

seek asylum in destination country travelling via Nepal to conceal their identity (Modi, 2025). Though India is signing extradition treaties with more and more countries but they generally cater critical financial offenders, terrorists, gangsters etc. but people from rural areas of Haryana generally charged with petty or localised crimes escapes easily from justice.

- **Drug Menace and Social decay:** Though not on a large scale but there happens to be an educated minority who are dissatisfied from current socio-political situation of the state and wish to migrate to a better country. Specially in the areas adjoining Punjab border, some parents are concerned about rising Drug problem and other social evils. they wish to give their kids better atmosphere and hence choose to cross border along with their young kids.
- **Peer pressure:** Since the ‘dunki’ migration has been given so much social legitimacy, the unemployed youth in villages of Karnal, Kurukshetra, Ambala is facing indirect pressure from their friend circle who undertook the migration. They are feeling left out and out of place in their village, moreover due to their friends being already present there it is easier for them to get job in foreign country through networking effect.
- **Effect of Punjab:** The areas adjoining the Punjab border are experiencing more ‘dunki’ migration than the rest of Haryana. The influence of neighbouring state can be felt through the hoardings and banners private of Visa consultancy and IELTS coaching on every corner of towns. Moreover, due to stricter regulations in Punjab the human trafficking smugglers have shifted their focus towards Haryana.

### **The movie ‘Dunki’**

In the movie *Dunki*, a film based upon real story some of the issues portrayed are common in both the state of Punjab and Haryana. The movie depicts the story of three friends from Laltu in Punjab who are influenced by most of the above-mentioned factors to desperately move out the country. Upon realising that they do not possess ‘cultural capital’ to get visa for United Kingdom and migrate legally, they resorted to a human trafficker who guarantees them of visa by providing fake documents but instead scams them and runs away with money. The movie raises several critical issues such as false perception of wealthy life of all emigrants, the connection of emigrants to their home country. Through the sentimental storytelling, the movie emphasises the interplay of nationalism and dependence on the foreign country. The movie resonates with most of the above points and depicts economic inequality in nations could lead to struggles transcending borders to mitigate the relative deprivation from their friends and families that have migrated (Hirani, 2023).

### **The ‘Dunki’ Route and Its Implications**

The "Dunki" route refers to an unauthorized migration pathway involving multiple transit points before reaching the intended destination involving illegal crossing of border. Emigrants from Haryana often travel through countries like Nepal, Turkey, and Mexico, ultimately attempting illegal entry into the United States, Canada, or Europe.

This route exposes migrants to several risks:

- **Exploitation by Traffickers:** Significant number of them falls victim to human smugglers who charge exorbitant fees, often abandoning them in dangerous situations. Migrants pay sum up to Rs. 60 lakhs per person to

smugglers without any money back guarantee in-case they are arrested and deported. The smugglers are called “donkers” and are usually deportees themselves or rejected visa holders (Yadav, 2023). The rates are dependent upon the routes selected by migrants among other factors. Many of them die on the way and survivors has reported extortion and violence by traffickers on the route. The ‘donkers’ often exploit the family left behind as well, due to they being only point of contact to emigrant.

- **Legal Consequences:** After crossing the wired border or check post if the migrants are caught, they face deportation, criminal charges, or indefinite detention in foreign detention centres. They are devoid of any legal support in their home country as well due to their own involvement in the illegal activity. Until recently the government of Haryana did not paid heed to these issues but after these mass deportations, now government has passed a bill in state legislative assembly called as *Haryana Registration and Regulation of Travel Agents Bill, 2025* which is yet to be implemented.

Recently enforcement directorate has conducted raids in 7 places across Punjab and Haryana under *Prevention of Money laundering act,2002* in connection to money laundering by deportees of ‘dunki’ route. They have used ‘dunki’ route as term for illegal migration in their official document. during the raids they have seized forged visa stamps of foreign countries. Karnal and Kurukshetra in Haryana has been investigated for the illicit activities by travel agents and ‘dunki’ migrants that were deported (Enforcement, 2025).

- **Health Hazards:** The journey involves extreme weather conditions, malnutrition, and physical exhaustion, leading to fatalities in some cases.

Especially in the US immigrants do not get basic civic amenities in the detention centres including health and legal aid, furthermore illegal immigrants face several issues like prostitution, drug supplies and sexual exploitation (Meenakshi, 2024).

### **Impact of Deportations on Haryana's Migrant Community:**

Deportations have far-reaching effects on deportees and their families:

- **Financial Loss:** Migrants invest significant sums in reaching foreign countries. Deportation not only nullifies these investments but also leaves families in debt, especially those who sold their land or gold to embark on this journey.
- **Psychological Trauma:** Deportees often experience anxiety, depression, and feelings of failure, struggling to reintegrate into society. Their families are reluctant to invest on them again once they get deported and they are depressed as their hopes and dreams are shattered.
- **Social Stigma:** In some cases, deportation leads to social ostracization, as families face ridicule for their unsuccessful migration attempts if not the migrants themselves. Moreover, some people view it as entirely criminal activity as it involves breaking multiple laws and they judge deportees as criminals leading to their further stigmatization.

Addressing these issues requires government intervention through skill development programs, employment initiatives, and mental health support for returnees.

### **Governmental Responses and Policy Implications:**

To combat illegal migration, Indian authorities must strengthen measures such as:

- **Enhanced Awareness Campaigns:** Educating potential migrants about the risks of illegal routes and legal alternatives.
- **Crackdown on Human Traffickers:** Strict enforcement against agents facilitating illegal migration. Timely implementation of newly passed laws to ensure the safety of emigrants.
- **Skill Development Programs:** Providing training and job opportunities within India to reduce the need for migration.
- **Diplomatic Efforts:** Engaging with foreign governments to ensure humane treatment of deportees and explore legal migration pathways.

All these efforts can reduce illegal emigration for quite some time only but the addressing of the root causes of the migration can only sufficiently ensure the non-occurrence of recent events in the long run. The recent incidents of the deportation should serve as wake-up call for the policy makers to devise policy framework which stops or inhibits the illegal migration and save the citizens of India from facing such humiliation.

### **Conclusion**

The depiction of illegal migration in *Dunki* movie mirrors real-life struggles faced by migrants from Haryana. The movie portrays disconnect between culturally suggested goals and restricted access to methods of achieving those goals by imposing structural and legal barriers. Recent deportation events highlight the urgent need for policy interventions to curb unauthorized migration while offering safe and legal alternatives. The biggest challenge in front of Indian government is of rising population of educated youth and the inability of government to integrate them in the job market matching their expectations. A comprehensive approach involving economic reforms, education, and stringent

law enforcement is necessary to address the issue effectively. Ensuring better opportunities within India can help mitigate the risks associated with illegal migration, ultimately improving the lives of aspiring emigrants and their families.

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