CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Indian community is spread around the globe with the estimated number of more than twenty six million out of which fifteen per cent resides in South East Asia; thirty per cent in the Gulf region; seventeen per cent in North America; seven per cent in the United Kingdom; four per cent in Canada; two per cent in Europe; six per cent in South Africa; three per cent in Asia Pacific and rest of them resides in Caribbean islands, Latin America, Israel and so on. This number is increasing further. Out of these, more than half are first generation migrants and their close families are spread widely. They play dominant role in every field of the country of their adoption. They maintain close connection with their biradari back in India through the social media, visits to India, through social relations like marriages and remittances back to India. According to a Government of India report of 2014-2015, we received $ 69.6 billion as remittance by non-resident Indians abroad during 2013-2014. This figure underlines the importance of Indian migrants living in different parts of the world.

I

The present attempt is to analyse the migration of Indians, particularly the Punjabis to South East Asian countries. There is further focussing on three countries Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. The history of early Indian migration to South East Asia go back to pre-Christian times and since then Hindu and Buddhist traders, priests, rulers and adventurers have been travelling to this region. Parallel to this, traders from South East Asian region especially Malays also travelled to Bay of Bengal. There are numerous references of journeys made back and forth from this region in literature. With time these interactions became strong and influenced the culture and society of South East Asian region which resulted into the emergence of various states based on Indian religious values and ideas. This is indicated by the high level of Hindu and Buddhist influence on Malay Peninsula. However, Hindu and Buddhist influence began to decline with the advent of Islam in this region. Muslim traders and merchants
accompanied by the *Ulemas* contributed towards the spread of Islam in South East Asia from thirteenth century onwards. These traders maintained trade relations and gained high positions in Malacca Sultanate through marriages and by constructing mosques. They replaced the Hindu traders and now began to control the maritime trade between India and Malay Archipelago. This situation was further disrupted with the arrival of Portuguese power during last decades of fifteenth century. They tried to control the maritime trade between India and Malay Archipelago by putting various restrictions like *Cartez* system and by forcing all the ships going to Malacca ports to pay tolls at Goa which was under the control of Portuguese. Situation further aggravated when other European powers started to take interest in this trade.

Position of Indian traders became insignificant with the emergence of British East India Company in Indian subcontinent. Starting with their factory at Surat, Madras and Cuddalore, East India Company gradually monopolised the spice and textile trade with Malay Archipelago. Balance of trade now shifted in favour of East India Company. British company further extended their dominance over this maritime trade against other European powers with the occupation of Penang (Malay Peninsula) in 1786, Singapore in 1819 and Malacca in 1824. In order to satisfy their commercial interests, plantation estates and mines were established and requirement of labourers was fulfilled by Indian convicts and slaves and later on South Indians were encouraged to migrate to work as labourers. The nature of this migration was different than the earlier migration of Indian traders.

**II**

The advent of British East India Company as a political power started a new chapter in relations between South East Asia and India. The establishment of British rule in India during the eighteenth century coincided with the industrial revolution in England. Major policies were adopted to discourage Indian indigenous industries with heavy excise and export duties while cheap British manufactured products were allowed to enter in Indian markets at nominal duty to cater the needs of British industrial capitalist’s interests. The British industrial capitalist’s interests to procure raw material at cheap rates and to sell their products in Indian markets were supported actively by
British Indian Government. Imposition of unfavourable tariffs had adverse effects on Indian indigenous industries. Indian industries could not compete with cheap British industries made goods. This resulted to the decline of indigenous industries. Cotton weavers were forced to work for the British companies at very nominal advances and were restricted to possess only one or two looms. This situation created heavy burden on agriculture as majority of artisans became agricultural labourers at very low wages. They had no choice but to search for jobs outside their surroundings.

Indian migration to South East Asian region may be understood in this context also. British administrators encouraged South Indians to migrate to colonies to work in plantation estates through indentured labour system earlier which was replaced by kangani system later. Recruiting depots were established in Negapatnam and Madras (Chennai). Labourers were required to sign the contract for two years. Statistical data reveals that there were total of seventy nine thousand Indian indentured labourers in Malaya from 1887 till abolition in 1910 while there were eleven lakh kangani labourers from 1898 till abolition in 1938. In addition to these migrants, other communities like Bengalis, Gujaratis, Chettiar and Punjabis travelled to Singapore, Malaya and Thailand to engage in other suitable occupations. They became moneylenders, shopkeepers, security guards, teachers and clerks etc. At present there are twenty one lakh thirty one thousand Indians in Malaysia, six lakh fifty thousand in Singapore and estimated one lakh ninety five thousand Indians in Thailand.

III

Situation of Punjab’s agrarian economic structure also underwent significant transformation with the establishment of British rule in second half of nineteenth century. British annexation of the province led to changes in administrative and agrarian policies. Irrigational projects were started to bring waste lands under cultivation. Variety of commercial crops and introduction of new means of transport and communications impacted the economy of Punjab in a varied manner. Railways connected the Punjab with rest of the world. This made export and import of commercial crops easier on one hand and easy availability of cheap factory made goods
on the other hand. Since the easy availability of these goods in markets, services of village artisans were rendered limited to only repairing and installation of implements. This directly affected their regular income. They were now gradually paid according to the work done by them on daily basis. With time, their role in village economy was reduced to wage earners. New land revenue settlements burdened cultivators to pay a fixed amount of revenue within a framework of time. Cultivators in turn had to depend upon sahukars for the payment of same during bad harvest, who gave credit to cultivators at very high rate of interest which was almost impossible to repay. Unable to pay the same, cultivators had to mortgage their lands as collateral. Gradually land rights began to be transferred to sahukars and cultivators became agricultural labourers in their own land at very low wages. Under these circumstances Sepidari system started to weaken. Unable to produce sufficient food, cultivators now were in desperate need for any opportunity in their way. Left with no choice, they were forced to search for jobs outside the village economy. British sought to utilize the services of sturdy Punjabis in various fields. Their use in the British Indian Army was one such option.

The Punjabis in the first instance were recruited in police services of Hong Kong and Shanghai. Regular pay and incentives attracted them to get recruited in police forces of Malaya and Strait Settlements. News of availability of jobs in these colonies soon reached every parts of Punjab province. Due to their strong physique, Punjabis were encouraged to get recruited by their fellow villagers who were already in these services and were sent by their higher authorities to recruit more of their kind. By last decades of nineteenth century, there was a fair number of Punjabis in Federated and Unfederated Malay police forces. There is sufficient evidence of their recruitment in Strait Settlements Police Force formed in (1881) and Malay States Guides formed in (1896). According to a survey conducted by Manjit Singh Sidhu, upon arrival, eighteen per cent Punjabis became labourers in mines, seventeen per cent were absorbed in police services, thirteen per cent became watchmen and security guards, seven per cent became salesmen and clerks, four per cent became milk men, bullock cart drivers and lorry attendants and small percentage was absorbed in teaching profession and in miscellaneous jobs.
According to a study, there were 584 Punjabi Sikhs in Malay States Guides before First World War and 527 Punjabi Sikhs in Strait Settlement Police Force in 1936. They were able to maintain their existence in these forces till the disbandment of Malay States Guides forces in 1919 and Strait Settlement Police force in 1946 respectively. After the disbandment of these forces, they were absorbed in other occupations. Only a few of them came back to Punjab. In order to supplement their income, Punjabis also engaged themselves in money lending business. There number was ten thousand in the early 1930’s.

In case of Thailand, The first Punjabi migrant to Thailand was Kirparam Madan who travelled to Siam in 1884 to starts his own business. After that, Punjabis arrived there, were mostly from Gujranwala, Shekhupura and Mianwali areas of undivided Punjab. Majority of them were from Arora castes. They started as peddlers by selling mosquito nets and some others obtained jobs as helpers in small textile shops. After accumulating some money, they established their own shops. According to a survey conducted by Manjit Singh Sidhu, upon reaching Thailand, fifty six per cent became peddlers and salesmen, six per cent became storekeeper and shopkeeper, and four per cent became teachers while others were absorbed in miscellaneous jobs in which tailoring business was substantial.

There was continuous flow of migrants to this region till the mid twentieth century after which various immigration laws were passed to restrict the entry of Indians by autonomous governments of almost every South East Asian country after their freedom from British colonial rule. Only limited entries to Indians were granted. At present majority of Punjabis residing in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand are the third or fourth generations of earlier migrants who settled there during the colonial rule.

IV

At present, Punjabis constitute about 3.8 per cent of the Indian communities and their estimated number is about twenty five thousand in Singapore; In Malaysia they constitute about 4.7 per cent of the Indian community and their estimated number is about one lakh. They constitute 41 per cent of Indian community and their estimated
number is eighty thousand in Thailand. They play dominant role in the politics, business and economies of these three countries.

Comparative study of Punjabis in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand gives out some interesting pointers regarding their level of absorption with the host country and connectivity with their *biradari* in Punjab. In Singapore, forty four per cent of Punjabis are from Majha region, forty per cent from Malwa and sixteen per cent are from Doaba. Twenty eight per cent Punjabis in Malaysia are from Majha area, sixty six per cent from Malwa and six per cent from Doaba area. In Thailand, fifty six per cent are from Majha while thirty per cent are from Malwa and ten per cent from the districts of Doaba. This indicates that large percentages of Punjabis in these countries are from the districts of Majha and Malwa as compared to the ones from Doaba districts.

In Singapore and Malaysia, majority of Punjabis went through agents or relatives already settled there. It is interesting that none of the Punjabi went to Thailand through travel agent. It is, however, certain that almost every Punjabi came to these countries for economic reasons. Some of them had earlier reached Bangkok during difficult times of partition with their parents and they got married here to those who already had been settled here. Statistical analysis indicates that twenty six per cent Punjabis in Singapore and forty per cent of Punjabis in Malaysia came on employment visa for two years after which they either applied again for contract renewal or travelled back to Punjab. There are estimated fifty four per cent Punjabis who are permanent residents while forty four per cent are on work permit and two per cent are on student visa in Singapore. In case of Malaysia forty four per cent of Punjabis are permanent residents and fifty six per cent are on work permit. However in case of Thailand, seventy four per cent of Punjabis are permanent residents.

Punjabis in these countries are engaged in variety of occupations. They are serving the armies, navy and police. They can be found serving in the banks, in IT sector and as lawyers and doctors. In addition to these occupations, they are in tailoring business, in constructions as construction workers, electricians and technicians. They are working in hotels and restaurants as cooks and waiters. They are also invited to serve in Gurudwaras as *granthis* and in temples as *pujari*. Besides these occupations,
they are working as domestic helpers in Singapore. In Thailand, majority of Punjabis are engaged in their own businesses of textiles, handloom, embroidery and hotel industry. Punjabis in these three countries have different professional profile. Statistical data based on field work indicates that in Singapore, sixty per cent Punjabis are skilled workers, twelve per cent are professional workers, twenty per cent have their own business and eight per cent are unskilled workers. In Malaysia, twenty six per cent Punjabis are skilled workers, twenty four per cent are professional workers, twenty eight per cent are businessmen and ten per cent are unskilled workers. In Thailand, twelve per cent Punjabis are skilled workers, four per cent are professional workers and eighty four per cent are businessmen. The basic minimum salary in Singapore is 27600 rupees per month and 16,000 rupees in Malaysia while 18000 rupees in Thailand. Malaysia has the largest number of Punjabis who have been paid less than 50,000 rupees per month while Thailand has the largest number of Punjabis engaged in business ventures and monthly income of more than ten lakh rupees per month.

Punjabis under study maintain close connection with their homeland through the money sent back to their family, frequency of visits to Punjab and matrimonial alliances within their community. They are bound with their religious organisations and sects back in Punjab and they visit their Deras and other establishments like Gurudwaras and Temples from time to time. It has been found that fifty per cent of Punjabis in Singapore and fifty two per cent in Malaysia send money back to Punjab. However, thirty two per cent of Punjabis in Thailand send money back to Punjab. This fact indicates that Punjabis residing in Thailand are less connected to their biradari back in Punjab.

Frequent number of visits made to Punjab to attend marriage ceremonies, visits shrines, pay homage to their Guru further strengthened the bond with their biradari back in Punjab. In Singapore, seventy four per cent of Punjabis and eighty two per cent in Malaysia made frequent visits back to Punjab is a strong pointer of their strong linkages back home. In case of Thailand, sixty per cent of Punjabis visit Punjab. Majority of Punjabis there are third or fourth generation of early Punjabis who travelled from Punjab during last decades of nineteenth century and early twentieth century.
Apart from this, Punjabis living in these countries have different individual experiences on the basis of which they express their desire to settle either in country of their adoption or in Punjab. Comparative analysis of these three countries on the basis of survey and field work indicates that, nearly sixty per cent Punjabis desire to settle in Singapore due to better infrastructure, facilities and good money. However thirty six per cent of Punjabis expressed their preference to settle in Malaysia while in Thailand seventy eight per cent prefer to settle there on permanent basis. Preference of the Punjabis to settle in Thailand means that these people have little or no connection with their kith and kin in the Punjab. They, therefore, have chosen to become the naturalized citizens of the country of their adoption. In case of Singapore and Malaysia, most of Punjabis came for short term for economic reasons and they prefer to travel back to their families after accumulating enough wealth.

Although Punjabis are trying to adapt in their country of adoption but they still maintain their culture and follow them in every aspect. One such aspect is the process of selection of their spouses. Majority of first generation Punjabis search for match within their community. Namdharis usually left this decision on their spiritual Guru back in Punjab. In rare occasions, Punjabis married outside their community where Punjabi Sikh boys married to a Malay and Thai girl. This trend is evidenced in third or fourth generation of Punjabis settled in these countries. Their preference towards selection of spouse seems to change according to the local existing culture of the country of their adoption.

In addition to this Punjabis play dominant role in the politics of these countries. On 25th November 2007, twenty thousand Indians including Punjabis gathered in Petronas Tower (Kuala Lumpur) to protest against exploitative policies adopted by Malaysian Government in favour of local Malays. Punjabi Party of Malaysia was founded by Jeswant Singh in 1986 with the aim of protecting the interests of Punjabi Sikhs in Malaysia. On 28th February 2014, Punjabi Party of Malaysia became a constituent party of national coalition named Barisan Nasional. Gurjeet Singh Rhande is the president of this party since 2013. Recently, an Indian origin Punjabi Sikh, Amar Singh became police commissioner of Kuala Lumpur. Punjabis are free to hold religious processions and even invite government officials to attend these processions.

There are renowned Punjabis named Gurmit Singh, Harminder Pal Singh,
Sukhdev Singh, Pritam Singh and Inderjeet Singh in Singapore politics. Pritam Singh Lone recently won the Singapore’s September elections of 2015. Punjabi is recognized as second language in school curriculum in Singapore. Punjabis in Thailand are well adapted than they are in Singapore and Malaysia. They even change their names to Thai names which is popular among their Thai friends. Those Punjabis are permanent citizens of the country and been living here for many years.

Punjabis have had their individual experiences in these countries. At present there are estimated two thousand Punjabis in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) who have been allured by fake promises of jobs. This has caused a serious problem, when they lose their passport and in some case end up in jail in these countries. In Singapore, those who are here for short term basis find it hard to adjust in metropolitan Singapore culture. In case of Thailand, many Punjabis had been living illegally on tourist visa and engaged as helpers in Punjabi restaurants. In Thailand, every now and then, friction between Punjabis and local Thais surface due to growing unemployment and low income jobs left for locals. They see Punjabis as ‘invaders’ who have come to grab the jobs meant for them. On the other hand, third and fourth generation Punjabis living in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand have their own fears. They are not willing to get married in Punjab as they find impossible that they could adjust in that strange environment. They prefer to get married where they have been living for many years. They however do want to visit Punjab but for short time.

To conclude, Punjabis in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand connected to their biradari through various agencies. They have been member of associations and Gurudwaras committees. They perform religious ceremonies and take out processions on auspicious days like Gurupurab, Janamashtmi, Holi and Diwali. They are in contact with their relatives through social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, emails and telephones. They remit money from time to time to their families and even buy properties in Punjab. At the same time they try their best to absorb with the local culture and society of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. They have adopted themselves to their cuisines, culture and names to fit in. Most of them see their future in these countries.