PREFACE

Present work deals with the Indian migration to South East Asian region particularly the Punjabis in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Many Historians and Sociologists have drawn their attention to the Indian and Punjabi communities residing in the U.S.A, U.K., and Australia. Their attention towards the Indian migrants to these countries is understandable. They are the largest contributors towards remittances of foreign currency in Indian banks. Interest towards the study of Punjabi community in South East Asian countries is a recent phenomenon. Majority of the work focuses on the historical journey made by the migrant in these countries. However only a handful studies have devoted their attention towards the sociological aspects of the lives of the migrants. Few of the studies are Kernial Singh Sandhu’s *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement, 1786-1957* (1969) and Some Preliminary Observation of the Origin and Characteristics of Indian Migration to Malaya 1786-1957 in *Intisari* (1970); Amarjit Kaur’s master thesis *North Indians in Malaya: A Study of their economic, social and political Activities with special reference to Selangor, 1870-1940* (1973); Kernial Singh Sandhu’s article Sikh Immigration into Malaya During British Rule in *The Punjab Past and Present* (1976); Manjit Singh Sidhu’s article Sikh Migration to Malaya (Peninsular Malaysia) (1983) in *Journal of Sikh Studies* and Sikhs in Peninsular Malaysia: Their Distribution and Occupations (1983) in *Asian Profile*; Manjit Singh Sidhu’s *Sikhs in Thailand* (1993); Phillip Courtine’s article The Most Integrated Indian Community in Thailand: The Sikhs of Bangkok Chinatown in *Guru Nanak Journal of Sociology* (1995); Surendra K Gupta’s *Indians in Thailand* (1999); Arunajeet Kaur’s *Sikhs in the Policing of British Malaya and Strait Settlements 1874-1957* (2003); Gurumukh Singh’s travelogue *The Global Indians: The Rise of Sikhs Abroad* (2003); A.B Shamsul and Arunajeet Kaur’s *Sikhs in South East Asia: Negotiating an Identity* (2011); Surendra K Gupta’s *Indian Diaspora: Study of Emerging Sandwich Cultures* (2013). Despite of all these studies, there is lack of published work based on the sociological objectives. The present work therefore is an attempt to study the Indian migration to South East Asia in general and the Punjabis in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. The course of study discusses the pattern of migration right from the pre-modern contacts. The present work takes into account the
level of absorption in the country of their adoption, role played by them in politics, economy and businesses, how far they have been able to project themselves in these countries and their relationship with their biradari back in Punjab. Our study is based on government files, non-official contemporary reports, census reports, government publications on census both in India and Singapore, annual reports of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs and Ministry of External Affairs, and largely on the field survey conducted in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Bangkok (Thailand) and Singapore. They have however their individual experiences in these countries but the fact that they are trying their best to assimilate in the society and culture of the locals on one hand and maintain their connection with their biradari back in Punjab remain constant.

Early contact between India and South East Asia dates back to the pre-historic times. Since then, Hindu, Buddhist priests and merchants have been travelling there and established their dominance in Malay courts. Many states were established in Malay Archipelago named after Indian states and rulers and were under the influence of Hindu-Buddhist religious ideas. This dominance remained undisturbed from the first century A.D till the advent of Islam with the arrival of Ulemas along with Indian Muslim merchants in Malacca from thirteenth century onwards. Hindu traders and Muslim merchants suffered heavily with the arrival of European powers particularly English East India Company.

British control over South East Asian region later on encouraged Indians to migrate to these newly established colonies to work in plantation industries of rubber, sugarcane, oil palms and tobacco as Indentured and Kangani labourers in the early nineteenth century. They were mostly South Indians. Besides labourers, they also came in these colonies to work as clerks, teachers, money lenders and traders. Besides South Indians, other Indian communities also arrived in these colonies. They were Bengalis, Sindhis, Gujaratis, Punjabis and Bohras who worked in a variety of occupations. Punjabis were hired to provide security to these colonies as regular police constables. In addition to this, they were also engaged as security guards, hawkers, peddlers, salesmen, moneylenders, farmers, dairy men and bullock cart drivers. This flow of migration remained steady till the 1950’s-60’s after which restrictions were imposed by newly appointed autonomous government of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. After
the independence, substantial number of them decided to settle in these countries. They applied for the citizenship of the country of their adoption.

Since the 1980’s -90’s, liberal immigration policy adopted by these countries prompted Indian communities particularly Punjabis to migrate to Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand in search of jobs for short period of time on contract basis. There have been great deal of change in their occupational profile particularly of the Punjabis compared to they had prior to Second World War.

According to the available statistical data there are estimated 6,50,000 Indians in Singapore; 21, 31000 in Malaysia and 1, 95,000 in Thailand. In Malaysia, majority of them came from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Bengal, Gujarat and Punjab. In Singapore, majority of them came from Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Punjab, and Bengal. In case of Thailand, majority came from Punjab and Uttar Pradesh and to lesser number from Gujarat, Maharashtra and South India.

The Punjabi community in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand is the focus of our research. According to our field work and with the consultation of various census reports including Singapore department of Statistics, that currently, there are 25,000 Punjabis in Singapore which is 3.8 per cent of the total Indian communities there. In Malaysia, there are 1,00,000 Punjabis which is 4.7 per cent of the total Indian communities there. In case of Thailand, there are estimated 80,000 Punjabis which is 41 per cent of the total Indian communities there. Punjabi communities in these countries composed of different castes and religious identities. Based on the survey questionnaires and field work, it has been found out that, Jats, Aroras, Khatri, Sunars, Namdharis (Thailand), are the most visible groups while to lesser extent Radhasoamis , Aryasamaajis and Rajputs. In Singapore, majority came from Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Jalandhar, Bhatinda and Ludhiana and to lesser extent from Batala, Faridkot, Tarn Taran, Hoshiarpur, Moga, Mansa, Sirhind and Pathankot districts. In Malaysia, majority of them came Ludhiana, Amritsar, Ferozepur and Moga while lesser came from Nawanshahr, Batala, Phagwara and Bhatinda. In Thailand, majority came from Gujranwala, Ludhiana, Amritsar and Jalandhar and to lesser extent from Phillaur, Bhatinda and Patiala.
According to our fieldwork, we found that, forty four per cent in Singapore; twenty eight per cent in Malaysia and fifty six per cent in Thailand came from Majha districts of Punjab. Forty per cent in Singapore; sixty six per cent in Malaysia and thirty per cent in Thailand belonged to Malwa district of Punjab. Sixteen per cent in Singapore; six per cent in Malaysia and ten per cent in Thailand came from Doaba district of Punjab. Fifty four per cent in Singapore; forty four per cent in Malaysia and seventy four per cent in Thailand are permanent residents while forty four per cent in Singapore, fifty six per cent in Malaysia and twenty four per cent in Thailand are migrants on work permit and two per cent on tourist visa. These findings are entirely based on the responses to our survey. We visited Hindu temple, Sikh gurudwaras and Namdhari gurudwara and interacted with number of Punjabis there based on pre framed questions as well as numerous points emerged during our conversation with them. Their responses, experiences, hopes and their attitudes have been included under separate section in our research.

The present study is based on variety of primary sources like Government files on emigration, Annual reports of Government of India (Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs and Ministry of External Affairs), Census reports of India and Singapore department of Statistics. Microfilms and contemporary reports and books on problems of Indian migrants have also consulted. A number of secondary sources have been consulted including Books, research articles, mimeographs, journals, newspapers, student repository collection, periodicals, master thesis and bachelor’s exercises, travelogue and oral interviews.

In the course of study, I have received considerable help from several sources. I am thankful to the library staff of Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; thanks to librarian Mr. Tin Seng Lim of National Library Board, Singapore for providing me useful information on books related to migration of Indians. I am thankful to National Archives of India and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. I am thankful to library staff of Mumbai University, Mumbai. I am also thankful library staff of Bhai Gurdas library and library of department of History and Sociology, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. I am grateful to Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), New Delhi for providing the junior research fellowship during the course of this study. I visited a number of places
in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand to collect required information and data regarding our research. To name a few are Gurudwara Tatt Khalsa Diwan, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur; Laxminarayan Temple, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur; Hindu Samaj, Bangkok; Gurudwara Shri Guru Singh Sabha, Phaurat market, Bangkok and Namdhari Sangat of Thailand. I also interacted with the active members of Laxminarayan temple, Singapore. Sociological and statistical methods have been used to analyze the collected information and data based on survey.

I am particularly thankful to Ishar Singh Koshar, President of Gurudwara Tatt Khalsa Diwan Selangor, Kuala Lumpur for providing me every possible information on Punjabis residing in Malaysia. I am thankful to Gursiopreet Singh, owner of Indian Restaurant and Lounge, Bangkok and Mrs. Simrat Kaur, of Namdhari Gurudwara for providing me the history of migration of Punjabi Sikhs and Namdharis in Thailand. I am also thankful to Mr. Rakesh Matta, president of Hindu Samaj, Thailand. I am grateful to Mr. Gurmeet Singh, owner of transport business in Singapore for his patience during long interview and responses to my each and every queries and lengthy list of questions. I am highly grateful to the Punjabi migrants residing in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand for sharing their experiences and taking time from their busy schedule. I owe personal debt to these individuals.

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