APPENDIX-I

THE SUCCESS STORIES

The story of Mansa Singh- the first Punjabi in Bahrain (1929)

Mansa Singh with his family members at Bahrain International Airport

Mansa Singh was born in 1901 at a village Sarangwal, district Hoshiarpur. His father was a carpenter and had four children. After marriage, Mansa Singh went to Bombay in search of job in 1927. Where he got selected in British Cable Company working in Bahrain and therefore he was sent to Bahrain. He worked in the company from 1929 to 1953 and then left the job and started his own electrical shop in Manama in 1953. Soon, with his hard work he established his own company, called “MANSA SINGH & SONS” at Shaikh Isa Road, Manama, Bahrain. The company dealt with electrical, carpentry, air-conditioning and refrigeration works, thus, he became the first multi-service provider in the country. The first big contract he got after opening of the company was the shuttering work of the pacc bridges in the country to replace the earlier wooden fabrications. Since Mansa Singh required workers to handle the project, he called many Punjabis in Bahrain. Most of them were his relatives and friends in Hoshiarpur. The royal family was so impressed by his services and dedication, that he was rewarded with a certificate of appreciation after the completion of the project. He was very religious man. It was on request of Mansa Singh that the management of a Hindu temple in Bahrain provided space for a Sikh temple where Punjabi community could celebrate their social and religious
occasions. He worked hard and established himself as a leading businessman in Bahrain. At the age of eighty, he left the responsibility of the business upon his son and came back to India as he wanted to spend rest of his life by recalling his childhood memories in Hoshiarpur. His son Swaran Singh was very ambitious like his father and soon he proved that he had all the skills to handle the business pressures. Everything was seemed fine but suddenly, the death of Mansa Singh on December 31, 1990 shattered the family.

Mr. Malkiat Singh

Malkiat Singh was born in a village named Phuglana in Hoshiarpur in 1952 in the family of Malook Singh who was a landlord having acres of land. He was uneducated but wished his children to have good education. Malkiat Singh began to work as a technician after completing diploma in air conditioning in Jalandhar in 1970 and then shifted to Delhi. He got married at the age of sixteen. His family had a good financial standing but he chose to stand on his own without taking any financial support from the family. Malkiat Singh struggled hard to find job but didn’t get any suitable one. His parents were worried about his career. His mother referred him to Mansa Singh. Mansa Singh immediately sent visa and called Malkiat Singh to Bahrain in 1972. Malkiat Singh was hard working, honest and expert in his profession. Mansa Singh impressed by his dedication and soon promoted him as a head mechanic in his company ‘Mansa Singh & Sons’. He was accommodated in the same building where Mansa Singh lived along with his employees. At the time of his joining he was paid 65 Bahraini Dinar per month.
Though, he had his own identity in the company and popular for all kinds of repair work, but he wished to have his own business and fortunately, he got that opportunity very soon. In 1982, one day Sheikh Isa Bin Abdulla Hamad Al Khalifa from the royal family of Bahrain visited Mansa Singh’s workshop and complained that the AC of his newly purchased luxury boat from Italy was not functioning. He also told him that he went to every mechanic on the island but no one could fix it so far. Mansa Singh pointed towards Malkiat Singh and said, “Don’t worry your highness. I have this man who has magic in his hands. Any machine touched by him gets repaired completely and does not trouble in future”. Sheikh was unsure of Malkiat Singh’s abilities but Mansa Singh took his guarantee. Sheikh took him to the boat. Initially, Malkiat Singh hesitated in touching the boat as it belonged to the royal family. Sheikh noticed his anxiety and said, “your owner trusts you fully and now it’s your turn to prove him right”. Malkiat Singh was emboldened with confidence and repaired it within 15 minutes. The Sheikh was stunned to see it and shouted loudly, “yes! your master was right, you know magic”. Sheikh was impressed by his work and asked him to demand anything but Malkiat Singh refused to have anything and replied humbly that he had done his duty for what he had been paid by the company. But on Sheikh’s insistence Malkiat Singh asked for a Commercial Registration (CR) which was necessary to run any business in Bahrain. Sheikh immediately permitted him to run his own AC workshop in Adliya (a place in Bahrain) where he had some land. Malkiat Singh told Sheikh that he could start his independent business only after if he would get consent from Mansa Singh. The Sheikh discussed the matter with Mansa Singh. It was difficult for Mansa Singh to release him because he too was dependent upon him. All the assignments of the company for the repair work were attended to by Malkiat Singh. He released him, though reluctantly.

Within two-three months, Malkiat Singh started his own workshop with the sponsorship of the royal family. Gradually, Malkiat Singh established himself as a prominent businessman in Bahrain. His workshop used to be overcrowded with customers. People believed that he had an exceptional ability in fixing all types of refrigerators. He was very loyal to the Sheikh who too treated him as his younger brother. His association with the royal family of Bahrain made him more famous. It
had been noticed that Arabs preferred to have only professional relationship with the foreigners but Malkiat Singh’s case was different. He had coordinal affiliation not only with the Arabs but with the royal family which was very unusual. But he never tried to take advantage of these links. Soon, his wife and three children joined him in Bahrain. At those times, Malkiat Singh’s family was the most reputed family among Punjabi community and had great respect in the country. The Sheikh helped them in each and every way he could. After the death of his first wife in 1990 he was married again with Surjit Kaur. Surjit Kaur began to look after his business and workshop as well. Surjit Kaur was very active and used to move from one place to another to keep a check on the employees in the workshop. She made an organization chart and asked everyone to follow it.

Circumstances took again a new turn with the death of Malkiat Singh in 2000. It was very hard time for Surjit Kaur as she was left alone in the country. She said, ‘my life became very complicated”. She told that without the help of the Sheikh, she would not have been able to survive in Bahrain. Shiekh visited the family for expressing his grief many times. Since they have a family relation with the royal family, he immediately wrote a letter to the Ministry of Immigration to allow Surjit Kaur a permanent stay in the country. Sheikh also helped her in transferring all business in her name.

Sheikh (in the centre) expressing his grief at Malkiat Singh’s death
Sheikh ensured her that he would be standing by her side like her elder brother if she would have any problem in the country while running business. She said, “He has always kept his promises”. She was reminded of an incident when a customer had an argument over the payments and he refused to pay the repair cost of the AC. The matter went to an extent that Sheikh’s intervention had to be invited. He immediately came in the workshop with a gun and put the gun on the man’s chest and shouted loudly, ‘if anyone in this country tried to create problems for this family, he would not tolerate it’. Whenever I got stuck in any difficult situation, he helped me in getting out of it”.

At present Surjit Kaur is the only Punjabi woman running business at her own. She is highly respected among the locals and the Indian community, especially the Punjabis. She is holding a CPR (Central Population Record) of managerial category, which reflects a sign of admiration among the business groups in the country. She is not paying any annual fee of CR (Commercial Registration) as it was exempted for the life time by the ministry. She is permitted to work or stay in Bahrain as long as she wishes to stay. She is happy with what she has today and keeps alive the memories of the past.

Mr. Paramjeet Singh Walia

Mr. Paramjeet Singh Walia in his workshop in Manama, Bahrain.

Mr. Paramjeet Singh is one of the richest Punjabis and the biggest service provider of the air-conditioners and automobiles workshops in Bahrain. Instead of
being so successful and well known in Bahrain, he does not want to settle there permanently. He loves his country and wants to come back. At present he owns two hotels in Jalandhar city. These hotels are being looked after by his sons, therefore, these hotels are doing good business too.

As regards the position of his community, he recalls, “at the time of my arrival in Bahrain, there were very few Punjabis and their number was not more than 50 at that time. Out of those, only 3-5 were in business, 15-20 Punjabis were employed in the Royal Air Force who were mostly Sikhs and the rest of the Punjabis belonged to labour category and working mainly as carpenters and masons. Mostly the Punjabis were staying single and only around 15 had their family with them. The relationship of Punjabi community with other expatriate groups was warm and friendly. The bond between them and the Arabs was mainly professional but there was a high degree of respect and understanding among them. The Punjabi community was known as the most hardworking group amongst others and the local Arabs looked at them with respect. They believed that one Punjabi man could fix a number of problems and thus they preferred to call a Punjabi if any kind of service was needed”.

Paramjeet Singh says, “as per as the freedom was concerned, the Punjabis as well as other communities were provided social as well as the religious liberty to some extent. There are no tensions between any Indian groups as each of them understood that they have belonged to the same motherland”.

Mr. Gurmail Singh
Gurmail Singh is a graduate and hails from Delhi. He had come to Bahrain on the invitation of his elder brother in 1985. The family originally belongs to Jagraon in Ludhiana District. He remembers the day he came to Bahrain. He says, “The airport was very ordinary and the country looked like a remote area. The temperature was very high and the humidity was unbearable”.

He got married in 1987 and soon his wife joined him in Bahrain. They were blessed with a daughter. Gurmail Singh remembers the day of Iran Iraq war. He says, “it was hard time for us. We felt frightened all the time. In those difficult days, the Bahraini people helped the foreigners in many ways. They provided food and other needed items to the helpless people and even offered airfares to those who had no money to buy tickets which was a great help. The locals used to mention that the Indians had done a lot for their country and it is the time to repay their services”.

The people started coming back to the Gulf countries when the war was over. A number of Indians also returned to Bahrain and other countries of the Gulf. Guramil Singh’s family also returned back. He worked for many years in the Bloch Company but later he resigned from the job and joined ‘Mohammed Salahudin Company’. Due to his market strategies the company started gaining good profits from business. The owner of the company was so happy with him and promoted him soon as co-ordinator. He was well-known not only for his business skills but also for his spiritual believes. Due to his efforts, a Gurudwara in Salmabaad area was opened. He was appointed as the president of the Gurudwara which he continues to be till date. He organizes social and religious gatherings for the Punjabis in Bahrain. He is highly respected in his community due to his politeness and helpful nature. He is very down to earth and humble person. He says, “I spent my whole life in Bahrain and saw many ups and down here. Though the climate is not favourable but the coordinal attitude of the locals towards other communities make them comfortable and inspire them to give exceptional output. When I arrived here, I found difficult to stay but later this magic land, where people welcomed you with their hearts embraced me with its open hands”.

**Mr. Vinay Diwan**

Mr. Vinay Diwan belonged to highly qualified family which basically belonged to Punjab (now a part of Pakistan) and settled in Delhi. After completing engineering
in mining with a specialization in explosives used for construction, he joined a British Company ‘ICI’ in India. During his job, he used to travel to the Gulf countries, including Bahrain. Once he visited Bahrain and got to know that the Bahrain government had planned to close down one of its small quarry of explosives. He decided to grip this quarry and approached the ministry in Bahrain. He was very intelligent and smart enough in dealing. To see his confidence and experience in mining work, the Prime Minister of Bahrain not only approved his application, but also offered him his partnership. He was amazed and accepted his offer immediately. In this way, he started his company ‘BRAMCO’ in Bahrain, initially with a minority share of 10 per cent and took over it completely in 1993.

In the intervening time, the Bahrain government decided to build a 27 km causeway through the sea between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The project was offered to BRAMCO Company for the supply of stone armor. At that time the company was involved in a number of projects like renovation of Muharraq Crossing, the Hidd port and the industrial area. Now Mr. Diwan wasn’t scared of anything and confident that he would handle it faultlessly. It was a huge project and the company completed it with excellence. The company provided around 11 million tones of rocks for the construction of the causeway. This was the biggest achievement of the company which became one of the leading companies not only in Bahrain but in the Gulf with the completion of that project. Within a short period, Mr. Diwan has become one of the most successful businessmen in Bahrain. Currently, BRAMCO is the only quarry exists in the country and considered as the most reputed company in the region especially in blasting and excavation activities. BRAMCO has many groups of companies functioning in twelve different countries in the world, like, U.S.A, U.K, Germany, U.A.E., Oman and India.

Recently, the big success of the company was its contribution in the construction of the Formula One Racing Circuit in Bahrain. iwan also contributed a lot in the construction of the Indira Gandhi International Airport Terminal 3 in India.

At present BRAMCO has 1200 employees of which nearly 700 workers are from Punjab. Mr. Diwan is very active in organizing a number of social activities in Bahrain. In his earlier times in Bahrain, he collected sufficient funds along with late
Mr. Aatma Ram Jashanmal, who was a leading businessman from Thatta for the building of Indian School in Bahrain which is one of the biggest schools in the region at present. He respects spiritual ethics and believes of different groups in the country. The best example of it is the functioning of Gurudwara, Hindu temple and Mosque in a single compound of the labour camp of BRAMCO. Mr. Diwan says, “I started BRAMCO with only 500 U.S. Dollars and at present its annual turnover is around 250 million U.S. Dollars with a production of 500,000 tons of rock a day. So, all credit does to largely to His Highness for his faith in me, my family’s blessings, the hard work of my employees and of course, God, who has given me the strength and the capability”.

Devotees gathered in the compound of the BRAMCO Temple and waiting for the langar (Community Meals).

Mr. J. S. Minhas

Mr. Minhas has a lot of respect among the business community in Bahrain. He belonged to Droli Khurad village near Jalandhar city. He did his engineering from Government Polytechnic College situated at Ambala city and started his own construction company. He was a hard working man but could not get good projects due to lack of finance. In the meanwhile, his sister who was married in Bahrain, asked him to come to Bahrain. Mr. Minhas accepted her offer and left for Bahrain in
1997. After his arrival, he soon joined a construction company in Bahrain as a consultant. After gaining enough work experience he established his own construction company named SHAGARDI CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS W.L.L and shortly it became one of the reputed construction companies in Bahrain. With dedication and focus he moved through a number of business activities and big contracts. The beautification and repairing work of Al-Areen- the Wild Life Sanctuary of Bahrain was the biggest achievement for his company. Today, Mr. Minhas is one of the leading businessmen involved in construction industry of the country. He also invested some of his capital in the business of hospitality by starting a Punjabi restaurant in Manama in Bahrain.

Mr. Minhas got married in 1995 and soon, his wife joined him in Bahrain. He has two children. He is very social and proud of his Punjabi culture. He says, “be it the attire or food habits, or lifestyle, our tradition and culture should not be forgotten”. He is a true community lover and involved in its affairs at each stage of its growth. He felt that Bahrain’s open atmosphere for the all was a great support for the foreign workers like him. He comments, “Bahrain has always welcomed the people, even from different lands. The government of this country offers everybody a unique opportunity to be successful. And Indians, especially Punjabis have contributed so richly to the island’s development with their skills and sweat.”

Dr. Mahinder Singh Gill

Dr. Mahinder Singh Gill in IBN Rusheed Hospital in the Zenj area in Bahrain.
Dr. Mahinder Singh Gill was among a few doctors living in Bahrain. He belonged to a village called Ramuwalia Nawan in Moga district of Punjab. His father was a revenue officer in Punjab government. He has two sisters and one brother. He passed MBBS in 1968 from Amritsar Medical College and worked in the AME College in Amritsar for ten years. Later on he got the opportunity to work in a private medical clinic in U.K., where he stayed till 1987. This was the period when most of the workers were moving to the Gulf countries because the Arab employers were offering high salaries to the foreigners than the others. And professionals, especially doctors were in great demand in the Gulf. Therefore, Dr. Gill also moved to Bahrain in 1987. With his many years of experience and his good nature, he got the opportunity to work with one of the biggest hospitals of Bahrain, The Salmania Medical Hospital. Dr. Gill was a very well known doctor in the hospital and considered as one of the best eye surgeons here. He worked in Salmania Hospital for a long period and later on, in 2001, he joined IBN Rusheed Hospital in the Zenj area.

He got married in 1985 with a girl from Ludhiana who herself was a doctor. He has two sons, the elder one is doing doctorate in medicines in England and the second one is about to complete his graduation. Presently, he is at his retirement age and decided to move to Canada as most of his friends had already shifted there. He has been an inspiration to his staff and to those who have known him through the years. He contributed a lot for the community welfare and played an active role in the establishment of Salmabad Gurudwara in Bahrain and served as its president for a period. Despite of his busy schedule he always remained a simple man. He found Bahrain a culturally rich and wonderful land. He adds, “I am very lucky that I got the work opportunity in Bahrain. It is a welcoming and hospitable place. When I reached here, I was scared as it was a new world for me. But this country and its people have accepted me with their open hearts. My parents are in India living with my brother’s family. I frequently visit India, but always want to come back as I never had any problem here as an expat. I have all respect and love for my motherland, India, but it is sad to mention that pay scales in India are very low in comparison to foreign countries. This is the reason why most of the people move to European countries, U.S.C, Canada, Australia and countries in the Gulf. Our government should think about it seriously”.
Mr. Jasveer Singh Sahni- the first Punjabi got Bahraini citizenship

Mr. Jasvir Singh Didar Sahni was born in Queta, Pakistan in 1946. In 1947, his family migrated and settled in Amritsar. His father was a businessman and wanted his children to get good education. Mr. Sahni was very sharp in studies. After completing Pre-Engineering from Amritsar in 1966, he did IIT from Kharagpur, West Bengal in 1971. In the same year, he got selected for the Indian Navy where he worked for five years. He got married in 1974 and has two children. In 1976, he took the ambitious step of moving to Dubai and joined Eastern Contracting Company. While staying there, he recognized the opportunity once again and started his own business in automobiles in Iraq and operated it from UAE. During his stay in Dubai, he met with Mr. E.K.Kanoo, the owner of Kanoo Group of Companies from Bahrain. He was impressed by his professional attitude and work ethics, therefore, he asked Mr. Sahni to come to Bahrain and to join Kanoo Group. Mr. Sahni, was not one to simply follow the expected path and liked to accept challenges. So, he agreed and joined automobile division of Kanoo in 1983 as a General Manager and shifted to Bahrain. The company was progressing under his guidance and the owner was really happy with his performance. In 1988, due to the illness of his father, he resigned from the job and returned India. As he belonged to a business family and has courage to give a new turn to his career, he started his own automobile company – JAYSON LINKS INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED in India. Soon, his business flourished due to his enterprising knowledge. But, his resignation was a great loss for the Kanoo Company, and the owner requested him a number of times to come back and rejoin the previous chair in the company. Mr. Sahni was a
visionary man and asked for his partnership in the company. Mr. Kanoo knew about his capabilities and business strengths and found that this partnership would result in a great profit for the company. So, he offered 49 per cent share of the company to him, but only for six years. Mr. Sahni found it an attractive proposal and accepted. He left for Bahrain in 1992 and continues as a General Manager in Kanoo till today. And the company that he heads and carries his name has become one of leading companies in Bahrain. Mr. Minhas has a good reputation among Arabs and other communities. He is the one who contributed a lot for the establishment of the Swami Narayan Temple in Bahrain and serving as president. He is deeply involved with Punjabi community in Bahrain and was the first Punjabi who has got Bahraini citizenship.