PRESENT WORK DEALS WITH THE INDIAN MIGRATIONS TO WEST ASIA AND THE GULF, PARTICULARLY PUNJABI MIGRATION TO BAHRAIN FROM 1930 TO 2007. HISTORIANS, SCHOLARS AND JOURNALISTS HAVE BEEN DEVOTING GOOD DEAL OF ATTENTION TO THE ROLE OF INDIAN SETTLED IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, AMERICA AND AFRICA AS THEY REMIT A GOOD AMOUNT OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE AND WIELD CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE IN SHAPING POLICIES OF THE COUNTRIES OF THEIR DOMICILE AND INDIA AND VICE VERSA.

Al-Sayegh presents an interesting work on the role of Indian merchant communities in Dubai. The Gulf countries are the major destination in West Asia where a huge Indian migration has been taking place for the past few decades. Myron Weiner’s article “International Migration and Development: Indians in the Persian Gulf” a serious attempt to understand the condition of Indians in the Gulf region. He takes into account only five of the six Gulf Cooperation Countries excluding Saudi Arabia. He discusses the state policies of the Gulf countries which acted as a driving force behind huge foreign labour import to these states. Apart from these studies, Reena Abraham’s book “Footprints in Time: The Story of Indians in Bahrain” traces the history of Indo-Bahrain relations. The work is useful to us because it highlights the possibilities of further research on the migrant communities in different countries of the Gulf.

The present proposal is to study the Indians in general and the Punjabis in particular who migrated to Bahrain in search of fortunes in different periods of Indian history. Social dimensions of migrations of the Punjabis, particularly with regard to the impact on the families back home have also been taken into consideration. Most of the analysis has been based on contemporary official, non-official records and largely on our field work which has been conducted both in Bahrain and different parts of Punjab. There may have been variation in their responses and opinions but the fact that the migrations have left tremendous impact on the families of the migrants as well as on the society remains constant.

Relations between India and the Gulf countries are traced back to the period of Indus Valley civilization. It was, however, during the mid nineteenth century that we find recorded references to the presence of Indians settled in this region. We are nevertheless, for the purpose of the present study, limiting ourselves to the Indian migration to the Gulf countries during the 20th century. Indians and the Punjabis started moving towards these countries during the 1930s after large oil reserves were found resulting in the growth of industry related to the production of oil by big multi-national companies. These companies offered lucrative employment as clerks, technicians, artisans and as skilled professionals. Several thousand Indians were employed in unskilled and semi-skilled work in construction sites and even
households after the oil boom of 1970s. The number of Indian migrants in the Gulf was only 14,000 in 1948, which increased many folds by the beginning of 1970s with the rising oil prices. The total number of Indians in United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Muscat and Bahrain grew to 2,57,000 in 1975 which touched to 33,18,000 in 2001. Presently, there are around 4.5 million Indian migrants in the Gulf countries and they formed the dominating migrant community in the region as well as in Bahrain. Bahrain is an independent kingdom in the Gulf region, comprising an archipelago of 33 islands in the southern Persian Gulf. Manama is the capital and the largest city of Bahrain. It has been inhabited since ancient times and was known as Dilmun. It remained under British control from 1861 to 1971 when it gained independence. It is a constitutional monarchy headed by the King Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa. Arabic is the official language of Bahrain, though English is widely used.

According to an estimate given by Labour Market Regulatory Authority of Bahrain, currently, there are around 3,00,000 Indians in Bahrain. They come mainly from the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. Other states having sizable number of total migrants are Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Goa and Punjab. The Punjabi community is the focus of our study. First Punjabi landed here in 1929 was Sardar Mansa Singh from Hoshiarpur. He invited a number of his friends and relatives to work in his company, “Mansa Singh & Sons” in 1950s. Gradually, their number increased and they market their presence as the most hardworking expatriate community on the island. According to our field survey it is estimated that currently, the Punjabis in Bahrain numbered 25,000 which is 9.8 per cent of the total number of Indians in Bahrain.

The Punjabi migrants are composed of different caste and religious identities. The Jat, Brahman, Rajput, Khatri, Kamboj, Sunar, Jhiwar/Lohar/Tarkhan/Saini, Ramgarhia, Parjapat, Ramdasia/Mazhabi Sikh and Muslims are the most visible groups among the Punjabis. It is noticed that Ramgarhia community constituting 34.4 per cent of the total community, followed by Ramdasia/ Mazhabi Sikhs with 19.2 per cent, Jat with 16.8 per cent and Khatri with 12.8 per cent. They belong to the districts of Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Gurdaspur, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Nawan
Shehar, Kapurthala, Ludhiana, Chandigarh/ Mohali, Moga, Sangrur, Ferozepur, Bathinda, Patiala and Ropar. Our findings are based on the responses to our queries. We visited their houses and interacted with them in informal manner. Our questions, however, were based on a structured questionnaire. In addition to the pre-formulated questions, several points emerged during our conversations with the subjects. The responses, experiences and attitudes of the respondents have been recorded and verified.

The present study is divided into six chapters. First chapter deals with the history of relations between Indian and West Asia through the ages in general. The kingdom of Bahrain is situated in the larger historical context, in particular. An attempt is made to explore the migrations to the Gulf and Bahrain from India during the pre-British period. The second chapter is an attempt to trace the circumstances and history of Indian and Punjabi migration to the Gulf countries, particularly after the end of World War I till the beginning of the present century. This chapter is a detailed analysis of the rise of economic opportunities that attracted large scale work force from different parts of India. Policies of the government of India and the governments of different Gulf countries, particularly Bahrain over the question of migrations have been discussed in third chapter. The fourth chapter is devoted to the detailed analysis of the Punjabi migrants in Bahrain. The questions addressed in this chapter are related to their social and economic background, occupations, level of earnings, savings and expenditure, marital status, education level and age composition. Fifth chapter is an attempt to understand the relations between the migrants and their families back home to comprehend the social and economic consequences of migrations as to how these have affected the lives of those who depend upon the migrants back home in Punjab. With the help of our survey we also try to identify with the psychological and sociological problems of migrants’ families back home. Conclusion of these chapters is presented as sixth chapter. It is followed by appendices and bibliography.

The study is based on variety of primary sources, like Reports of the Government of India, Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain, different organs of the United Nations, World Bank, various other agencies have been identified and
consulted. A number of secondary source have also been consulted including books, research articles, encyclopedia, Journals, newspapers and periodicals.

In the course of this study, I have received considerable help from several sources. I am thankful to the staff of library of Indian Council of Historical Research Delhi. I am highly grateful to the staff of Bhai Gurdas Library and the Library of the Department of History and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. I visited a number of places in Bahrain to collect the required information regarding my work which mainly include the Bahrain Historical & Archaeological Society, Immigration Department, Government of Bahrain, Bahrain National Museum, Shaikh Isa National Library and Indian Embassy in Bahrain. I also visited social, cultural, educational and religious associations like Indian Club, Indian School, Keraleeyeya Samajam, Krishna temple in Manama, Manama Souk and all Sikh Gurudwaras in Bahrain. As has been pointed out above much of the work is based on the field work. Historical, sociological and statistical methods have been used to analyze the collected data.

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