This paper will explore the issues surrounding debt and debt absconding in these three periods, emphasizing their impact in the areas of politics and social relations in the ports along the southern Gulf. This paper draws on documents from the India Office Records and monographs and magazine articles published locally in the UAE. Debt was a key feature in pearling during the 19th and 20th centuries. Some limit the discussion of debt and debt absconding to the 1870s, when the British stepped in to negotiate an end to the practice. In reality, the problems of debt and debt absconding existed before and after this dividing line and had significant political and social implications. Not only did debt bring some polities to the brink of war, Abu Dhabi-Dubai (1849) and Ajman-Um al Quwain (1878) but it also led to serious social problems in the 1930s as a number of merchants went bankrupt after British Indian merchants used the authority of the British to collect debts at this economically depressed time.