CHAPTER 4

AHMEDABAD: CIVIC LEADERSHIP AND ITS SOCIAL MILIEU, 1856-1919

This chapter looks into the day-to-day struggles for power and justice under colonial domination, which were in themselves significant engines of cultural change. Unlike caste, tribe and religion, the notions of the people, the public good, democracy and nationhood were by no means natural ones but were culturally constructed by the Indian elite in their day-to-day politics under the British Raj. Also of great significance were the colonial sites such as the schools, courts, municipalities, and provincial assemblies to the development of public culture. The elite of Ahmedabad operated within the contours of the institutions created by the British. The colonial rulers successfully forged a loose hegemony over certain arenas of politics in the city. While working within these structures, local leaderships repeatedly challenged British colonial models as they gave meaning to their actions. Commitments to ethnic identities, to democracy and to nationalism, commitments that characterised the culture of politics in India were, to an extent, by-products of a colonial domination that stretched into the ideological sphere. As suggested by Ashis Nandy, British colonialism was not merely a matter of the conquest of territory and the appropriation of Indian economic resources; it also involved the “colonisation of minds”,¹ and one may add the resistance therefore emerged at both ends.

In Ahmedabad, the first to engage with the British were the scions of the powerful Nagarsheth family, who won imperial approval with their philanthropy. They stressed the values of social reputation, duty to family and caste, based on the overriding principle of loyalty. In the second half

of the nineteenth century, when numerous textile mills were set up in the city, the industrial bourgeoisie through their charitable endowments widened the sphere of public culture. The last to enter the public arena were the Gandhians, English educated professionals who paradigmatically changed the discourse of the city’s politics, in countering colonial hegemony.

Initially, the foundations of the Raj rested largely upon informal ties between a foreign administrative elite and the notables, accepted by them as the leaders of the city’s religious and business communities. The gradual spread of formal education meant that new groups emerged to take over the mediating roles in the city. Lawyers, doctors and other English educated professionals, most of whom would not have achieved recognition as leaders of local social groups, had captured the municipality and positions as the most significant advisors of the British officials.

The English educated elite drew upon British political models and cast their appeals for justice in terms appealing to the colonial rulers. The principles of progress, the public good, will of the people, patriotism dear to the culture of England were imbibed and the officials of the Raj were exhorted to uphold them. Voluntary associations, educational societies, cooperative unions and the press were the fresh sites to claim the government’s attention. The officials who reluctantly acknowledged the conception of the public good among Indians accepted appeals couched in such British idioms. Acquiring privileged positions in the political system of the Raj, the emergent elite projected a self-image as leaders of a public that cut across the boundaries of various groupings in the city. The ability to communicate in the alien tongue of the Raj, led to a paradigm shift in the manner by which the notables sought to influence colonial policy and defend themselves against potentially threatening imperial initiatives. It
was in their schools and colleges that many members of the Indian elite were exposed to European political traditions, to law, and to parliamentary procedures that became so critical to their policies.

THE REWARDS OF EDUCATION

The Raj in Western India was not only concerned to bind the city's leading communities to it by ties of commerce, it also aimed to increase the ties of understanding between rulers and ruled by the introduction of a new type of education.

On one hand the various departments of government required clerks and copyists who could write a good English hand and loyally carry out orders. On the other, it was hoped that the introduction of Western learning would lead to a transformation of the Indian scene.²

Elphinstone saw in the educational reforms of the Indians a great possibility for a better and prosperous social life of the people. In the report, which he wrote on leaving the Deccan in 1819, he declared that there was no way to improve the morals of the people, except by improving the education.³

For an average Indian, the chances of gaining employment were remote, for caste restrictions and capital hindered their progress. The only viable option was seeking clerical openings. "Some engage in trade. They are, however, comparatively few in numbers. For commerce needs capital and hereditary aptitude for business, neither of which is usually possessed in any sufficient degree by those educated in our colleges."⁴ To illustrate,

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⁴ *Education Commission, 1882*, p.302.

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in a survey of the careers of over 1700 Calcutta graduates, only one was a merchant and two were planters.\(^5\)

Since education was the prime requirement for the viable choice of public service and the professions, all roads led to the schools and then back to the public services and professions. Only the high castes enjoyed the privilege of education from the ancient times. Under the British, higher education was primarily a course offering its pupils the new qualifications now demanded for just those employments, which were traditionally theirs; the new elites moved unswervingly down these two avenues of employment.\(^6\)

In societies, with a backward economy, the will and working of government is the mainspring of enterprise. In India, government had always been the largest employer, and service under it the main avenue of employment for the literate and professional classes of the country. A desk in the government office has been a solid claim to esteem. It was from the administration that all blessings tended to flow, membership of the regime offered local influence and security of employment. More important, it was the first rung on the ladder of power.

The most preferred occupation, which employed a large number of fresh graduates, was teaching. Here the opportunities ranged from the comparatively respected and remunerative positions in the Departments of Education as deputy inspectors of schools and as principals and professors in government colleges and high schools down to the humble position of schoolmaster in the village.\(^7\) To illustrate, in Madras, where the range of openings was less ample than in Bengal or Bombay the

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5 Report of Department of Public Instruction, Bengal, 1876-7, p.65.
6 Anil Seal, op. cit. p.115.
7 Education Commission, 1882, p.302.
Education Department took more than half the graduates recruited by government between 1871 and 1882 and a very large number of those not in the public service were engaged in educational work. In 1887, Bombay decided that in future it would employ in government schools no teacher who had not passed the Fine Arts examination. In 1882, there were 62 graduates, 44 men who had passed the Fine Arts, and 209 matriculate on the governments’ payroll of 448 teachers in its high schools and middle schools. Only 133 of them, mainly instructors in ‘special subjects’ were without any university education. However, there were no teacher training schools to train teachers and maintain standards. The profession was highly respected despite their low salaries.

The legal system in India was radically transformed. It was essential to regulate the qualifications of pleaders and streamline legal training. Pleaders were employed in both civil and criminal suits. There was a gradual but steady rise in its numbers. Almost 14,000 persons belonged to the legal profession in the three Presidencies by the late nineteenth century. This was because the litigation over land increased in both volume and complexity. Between 1856 and 1886, the number of civil suits in India almost trebled. More than a third of these suits were in Bengal, where the system of land tenure encouraged an immense volume of litigation and supported the largest legal profession in India. By 1881, more men were employed in the law in Gujarat and the Deccan, in Western India, than in Bombay city. Out of 440 men employed in law in Gujarat, 148 were in Ahmedabad, 114 in Surat, 579 in the Deccan, 153 in Poona, and 360 in Bombay city.

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8 Ibid.
9 RDP/, Bombay, 1877-8, p.30.
10 Education Commission, 1882, p.126.
11 1881 Census, Bombay – 1904, Madras-4705 and Bengal 7261, employed in the legal profession.
13 1881 Bombay Census, pp.50-1, Out of 440 men employed in law in Gujarat, 148 were in Ahmedabad, 114 in Surat, 579 in the Deccan, 153 in Poona, and 360 in Bombay city.
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Along with the rise in numbers in the legal profession, its professional status also grew. And this was paralleled by the better opportunities afforded to Indians in the judicial section of the government. Surveying the changes of a generation, an official memorandum published in 1889 noted the advance made by the great majority of native judges and magistrates in their own levels of education, in legal training and in uprightness of character. Thirty years ago, few of these officers knew English, none of them had obtained a University degree and hardly any enjoyed any legal training. By the late 1880s nearly all-civil judges in the older provinces knew English and many were University graduates in arts or law. Similarly in most provinces all salaried magistrates appointed in recent years were men of education.14 By 1888, there was at least one Indian judge at each of the High Courts. With hardly an exception the subordinate judges and magistrates were Indians; nine-tenths of the original civil suits as well as three quarters of the magisterial business of the courts of India came before Indian judges and magistrates.15

Gradually, the lawyers emerged as spokesmen for the educated; since they could grapple with the constitutional niceties of the rulers. They were eminently suitable to take the lead in politics. As an independent professional, living in the administrative centres, he had ample means of his own. A community of interest bound him to other educated men. In the Presidency capitals, it was the successful high court lawyer who was the backbone of politics; in the mofussil, it was the pleader at the district bar.16 B.C.Pal noted that the lawyers rise into considerable power and influence

15 Ibid.
16 Seal, op.cit, p.130.
over their countrymen in every district through their position at the Bar. This was subsequently characterised as ‘Vakil Raj’. 17

THE EDUCATIONAL SCENARIO IN GUJARAT

The British officials were very cautious in their efforts to introduce reforms in Indian society. They were rather afraid to thrust reforms on the people by means of legislative enactments, which would serve neither their own colonial interest nor the interest of social reform in India. Hence, though the educational system was essentially liberal in nature, the British administrators tolerated the Hindu prejudices against the entry of untouchables in the schools as late as 1838. 18 Mrs. Postans, a British lady, who travelled extensively in Gujarat during 1838, while feeling happy at the progress and the “work of improvement” that was taking place in Western India was distressed to find that the schools of the Bombay Educational Society, a semi-official body, tolerated the brahmanical prejudices against the lower caste people and debarred them from entering their schools. The British principal of the Bombay Native School told her: “Unless such restrictions existed, the wealthy and influential would withdraw their sons from a school which they could only consider as one of the most degrading pollution.” 19

There is an interesting incident showing the people’s attitude towards an untouchable being admitted in a Christian school. Before the Government school was started in Ahmedabad in 1846, a Christian missionary who ran a school, admitted an untouchable boy in his school. But the Hindu children and their parents strongly resented the missionary’s action and boycotted the school. Fearing people’s reaction, the missionary

17 B.C.Pal, Memories Of My Life And times, Calcutta, 1951, p.36.
proposed to keep the untouchable student outside the classroom and make some other arrangement for his studies. But the people opposed this meagre concession and under the leadership of Nagarsheth Himabhai and other influential people like Hathisingh Kesrising, sent a petition to the Board of Education to start a school in Ahmedabad. The Government conceded the peoples' demand and started a school on 1st January, 1846, incidentally the first government school in Ahmedabad.  

The British officials in their individual capacity began fighting for the rights of untouchables to enter schools. To illustrate, Mr. Seward, the secretary of the Gujarat Vernacular Society, threatened to dismiss a Brahmin teacher and appoint a Muslim or Parsi teacher in his place when the teacher stopped the entry of an untouchable in his class. Mr Seward forced the Brahmin teacher to accept the pupil in his class.

The idealism of the British liberal and rational thought was expressed by Elphinstone when he declared that, it will be better for us to lose the country by the effects of our liberality than to keep it like Dutchmen or Spaniards.” Lord Macaulay expressed the same sentiments before the House of Commons on July 10, 1833.

“It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system until it had outgrown that system, that by good government, we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better Government: that having become instructed in European language, they may in some future

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20 Maganlal Vakhchand, Ahmedabad No Itihaas, Ahmedabad 1851, p.184.
21 This society was founded on Dec.26, 1848 in Ahmedabad by the efforts of British officials like A.K.Forbes, Major Fulljames, Captain R. Wallace and Dr. Seward. It was a pioneering institution of social reform movement in Ahmedabad. For the details of the history of the Gujarat Vernacular Society, see Hiralal Parekh, Gujaral Vernacular Society No Itihaas, 3 Vols. In Gujarati, Ahmedabad 1937.
23 Ballhatchet, op.cit, p.249.
age dream European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not. But never will I attempt to avert or retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history.\textsuperscript{24}

Such views were best represented in the policies of Lord William Bentinck and Lord Ellenborough respectively in Indian politics.\textsuperscript{25}

The pioneering educational experiments in Gujarat were made under the direction of Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay Presidency from 1819-1827. Lord Elphinstone encouraged the founding of a Native School and School Book Society. The Bombay Education Society, which pioneered modern education in Western India, was founded in 1815 by the European inhabitants of Bombay, for the purpose of promoting the education of the poor within the Government of Bombay. The objective was to train children of their countrymen (Europeans) in pious attachments to the principles of Christianity.\textsuperscript{26} Nevertheless, the society, from the outset, worked to extend the benefits of education to those Natives who desired them, with the proviso that they might be exempted from the application of such rules and regulations as might appertain to religious instruction.\textsuperscript{27} As a result of this, several children of Hindus, Muslims and Parsis attended the Society's school. The same society opened schools at Surat in 1817 and Bharuch in 1820. Under Lord Elphinstone's presidency, the Society resolved in 1819 that a separate "Native School and School Book Committee" be formed in which 12 Indians were also to be included.\textsuperscript{28} The purpose of this Committee was "to prepare books in the native languages, which without any reference to the religious matters should tend to improve the morals, enlarge the understanding and promote

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, p.250.
\textsuperscript{25} George Pearce, \textit{British Attitudes Towards India, 1784-1858}, OUP, 1961, p.5.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{First Annual Report of the Bombay Education Society}, 1816, pp 6-7.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Third Annual Report of the Bombay Education Society}, 1819, pp 4-6.
general and useful knowledge”. It’s other objects were to improve existing schools and to establish new ones to provide a body of qualified teachers and translators from among the natives and to afford facilities for further improvement to selected scholars for acquiring knowledge of the English language and of European sciences. In August 1822, it was decided to develop it as an institution devoted entirely to the “moral and intellectual improvement of the natives and entirely apart from Christian education”. From 1827, this society was known as the Bombay Native Education Society.

It was on the recommendation of Lord Elphinstone that the Court of Directors of the East India Company sanctioned a grant-in-aid to the Society and accepted it as the principal agency for the spread of education among the people. It was only in 1840, when the Government of Bombay established a Board of Education that the society was wound up.

Many pioneering institutions were set up – The Elphinstone College in 1834, The Grant Medical College in 1845 and the Engineering Institute as early as 1824; some of the most noted social reformers like the poet Narmad, Karsandas Mulji and Durgaram Mehtaram who launched a ceaseless battle against the social evils in Gujarati society in the latter part of the nineteenth century were directly or indirectly associated with the academic institutions of Bombay.

The Government had a clear-cut programme for training the teaching personnel in the main urban cities to begin with. In order to improve the quality of teaching, it started a training school at Bombay in the middle of the 1820s and soon completed the training of ten Gujarati Brahmins, 3 for Surat, 3 for Ahmedabad, 2 for Broach and 2 for Kaira.

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29 Ibid, p.28.
32 Makrand Mehta, op.cit, p.258.
Durgaram Mehtaram of Surat and Tuljaram Sakharam of Ahmedabad who pioneered female education in Gujarat were the most famous teachers among the students of the first batch.³³

In 1846, for example, Tulijaram succeeded in having four girls admitted to his school No.1 at Ahmedabad. Appreciating his efficient handling of the school, Mr. Green, the Collector of Ahmedabad stated: "The master has succeeded also in introducing some of his caste people to send their daughters to be taught; the teacher may be appreciated."³⁴

But it was Ranchodlal Girdharlal who strived hard, "to find out from Gujarat, men who would fulfil the requirements of the Bombay Native Education Society by severing all connections with the old method of training and abjuring belief in all superstitions such as the earth being flat and stationary."³⁵ He was probably the first Gujarati educationist to write and translate textbooks on arithmetic, history, geography and science. It is remarkable to find several British officials like Dr. Drumond who published a book on Gujarati grammar as early as 1804 and George Jervis taking pains to study Gujarati and trying to develop the prose form of Gujarati literature.³⁶

By 1846, the government had started schools at the following centres: Surat (9), Ahmedabad (2), Bharuch (2), Kaira (1), Dholka (1), Nadiad (1). These schools, though few in number were based on the new model, the school masters being well trained in their profession. The teaching curriculum strongly emphasized the knowledge of english, mathematics, sciences, history and geography. The beginning was modest and slow. The response was healthy since local elites, persuaded the

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³³ Ibid.
³⁴ Report of The Board of Education 1846, p.50.
³⁵ K.M.Jhaveri, Further Milestones in Gujarati Literature, Bombay, 1924, p.5.
³⁶ Ibid.
parents to send the children to school. But the large mass of people living in smaller towns and villages remained isolated on account of the ill-conceived theory of downward filtration. The British idea was to have English for the elite and the vernaculars for the multitudes, to propagate the knowledge of English first and leave the growth of the vernaculars to popular enlightenment aided by such encouragement as it may be in their power to give.\textsuperscript{37}

Despite all the limitations, a steady progress was achieved and the Gujarat Vernacular Society founded in 1849, in Ahmedabad, enrolled in its school as many as 20 females. Maganbhai Karamchand started a female school in Ahmedabad in 1851 and many reformers followed his lead. Mr. Graham, a British official associated with the Board of Education expressed a note of optimism when in 1852, he reported:

"It is a pleasing reflection that the strong prejudices entertained by the people against female education are beginning to give way in the small towns and villages as well as cities – as for example in Jambusar and Dhandhuka schools, 10 girls are receiving elementary education."\textsuperscript{38}

The liberal ethos of the new Education Policy was reflected in the Charter Act of 1833, which theoretically accepted, at least, the principle that "no native of India, nor any natural born subject of His Majesty, should be disabled by holding any place or employment by reason of his religion, place of birth, descent or colour."\textsuperscript{39}

There were some interesting debates on the medium of instruction in which Indians such as Jagannath Sankerseth and Framjee Cowasjee

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Report of The Board of Education}, 1851-52, p.71.
\textsuperscript{39} Makrand Mehta, op.cit, p.260.
participated. This controversy ended in favour of English at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1888, when Bombay University decided to eliminate vernaculars from their examinations, the Gujarat Vernacular Society sent a memorandum to Bombay University requesting it to continue the teaching of vernaculars in their study courses. Important leaders like Premabhai Hemabhai, Bholanath Sarabhai and Ranchodlal Chotalal signed the memorandum. In 1898, D.B.Manibhai Jasbhai requested the University to accept the vernaculars for schools. However, at the end of the nineteenth century, the vernaculars got an independent status only at the M.A. level. 

The new educational measures broke the priestly monopoly on education. It was specifically mentioned in one of the works on school system “that simple reading, writing and calculation should be known by everybody, from a king to an untouchable, men and women alike.” The government issued a circular in 1880, to the effect that the untouchables have as much right to education as the Brahmins and the Baniyas.

In spite of the fact that conscious efforts to educate the people were started from 1826, we observe that, numerically, progress was not very significant. At the end of the last century, there were in Gujarat 1305 schools of various categories and 100,350 students studying at various levels. The estimated population of Gujarat was then 2,702,099. Thus, hardly 4 percent of the population of Gujarat had access to modern education and even out of this small number, only an insignificant number attained higher education. This is revealed by the fact that in the years

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40 Hiralal Parekh, Gujarat Vernacular Society No Itihaas, Part II, 1933, Ahmedabad, p.12.
42 Gujarat Shalapatra, 1880-81, p.192.
1898-1901, only 399 students were studying in the 3 colleges and there was only one law class in the Gujarat division.44

The tone and tenor of the work done by students – for example, from the Elphinstone College in the 1850s reflects the concern of the emerging intelligentsia: “On the best method of elevating the castes of Mahars, Dheds etc. from their present social and moral degradation,” “the early marriage question,” “the influence of custom in India.” The aim of those in charge of education was that this fundamental questioning of society should penetrate to corners more remote than those of college classrooms.45

However, there were dissenting voices too; “why did you spoil my life by making me an M.A.?” “Modern reform or a fascinating dangerous trap,” “New era – nectar or poison?” were the titles of some of the pamphlets which became popular.46

Education was seen as the chief instrument to “civilise” the natives, so that they will better imbibe and emulate Western thought. As observed by Macaulay in 1833, “we are free, we are civilized, to little purpose, if we grudge to any portion of the human race, an equal measure of freedom and civilization.”47 As observed by Trevelyan, English education and the spirit of English literature was expected to make the educated Indians “more English than Hindu just as the Roman Provincials became more Roman than Gauls or Italians.”48

44 Ibid
45 Christine Dobbin, Urban Leadership in Western India, Politics & Communities in Bombay City, 1810-1865, OUP, pp. 53-54.
46 Navalram Trivedi, Samaj Sudharamu Rekha Darshan, 1934, Bombay, p.148. *Contrary to this, Capt Jervis in his Minute on the relative merits of English and the vernaculars stressed the later to disseminate knowledge to the natives of India.
47 Bearce, op.cit, p.179.
Undoubtedly, English schools and colleges provided critical socializing for the boys and young men who attended them. Exposed to an education in which praise of British practice and criticism of Indian custom were common, many went out into their society ready to implement reforms. Though the students often adopted the language of public politics in an almost pure form, they rarely chose to emulate European familial norms, to abandon their castes or convert to Christianity, despite extensive exposure to the social and religious criticisms of English reformers and missionaries. They accommodated more strongly to the British values that seemed relevant in the most critical arenas of colonial politics. Education was itself a political process that involved power, negotiation and sometimes resistance. 49

Thus, the schools were the first in the series of heavily politicised contexts in which young men learnt to generate new cultural meanings. These were places where they acquired a practical competence in specialized skills they could put to use in later activities: control over the English language, a command over the canon of European political philosophy, familiarity with the traditions of British local and parliamentary politics, an understanding of law, and proficiency in debate and drafting petitions. Outside the classroom walls prominent Indian leaders in the Presidency cities also exposed them to models of political action already in use. 50

49 Ibid
THE NOTABLES

The local elites created the public sphere in Ahmedabad. These notables\(^{51}\) came from diverse background and had different spheres of influence. For the British, they were local men of influence, though of a primordial nature. They, in turn were the intermediaries between the local population and the British officials, resident in the city.

It was these men who first began to appropriate a British civic idiom and to forge a new style of politics centring on the concepts of the public and public good. They got involved in municipal government; they got engaged in public philanthropy, they participated in imperial ritual life and took recourse to pressure group politics. However, this does not mean a total acceptance of Western principles. Civic politics became an important site to expand their network of social relationships and protect their family's reputation and defend their moral communities. Hence, the language of civic politics played a crucial role in the cementing of deferential ties with the ruling group and enhancing claims to political power.\(^{52}\)

In the case of Ahmedabad, the *Nagarsheth* family, were the prominent notables. Emperor Jahangir conferred the title on Sheth Shantidas. *Nagarsheth* Premabhai Himabhai, born in 1815, into a *Shravik Oswal Bania* family was a staunch ally of the British. He helped to maintain peace in the city during the tumultuous days of 1857. When the rebels gained control in Central India, he helped to forge links between Indore and Ahmedabad so that news could be relayed speedily.\(^{53}\)

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\(^{51}\) Haynes uses the term 'notables'.

\(^{51}\) Ibid

\(^{53}\) S.P. Vallabhji *Representative Men of Ahmedabad City*, Rajkot, 1918, p.20. (Gujarati)
Along with Hathising Kesrising (his brother-in-law), they spent Rs. 44,300/- to build a hospital in the city. He also set up a library at the cost of Rs.7, 250/-, now famous as the Himabhai Institute and another Rs. 10,000/- for Gujarat College. Moreover he instituted a medal for the topper of Grant Medical College, Bombay. *Nagarsheth* Premabhai donated around Rs. 10,000/- for Bombay’s Victoria Garden and Albert Museum in 1863.\(^5\)

When Ahmedabad was ravaged by a famine, Premabhai shelled out Rs.2 lakhs as charity. He was very liberal in instituting fellowships and donated Rs.2, 000/- to Gujarat Vernacular Society. He set up *dharmashalas* in Naroda, Sarkhej, Barwara, Umrala at a huge cost of Rs.23, 000/-. He spent Rs. 5 lakhs on renovation of the Shetrunjo shrine and *dharmashala* in Kathiawar. He was also a member of the Legislative Council, till his death in 1887.\(^5\)

Another family, related to the *Nagarsheths*, was Hathising Kesrising-(1796-1846). At the time of his death, his property was worth Rs. 90 lakhs.\(^5\) At the cost of 12 lakhs, he built a magnificent Jain temple, outside the Delhi Darwaja. He amassed his fortune selling opium to China.\(^5\)

Hathising’s young widow, Harkunver Shethani, used her husband’s wealth for the city’s welfare. Considering the harsh conditions of the widows, during the period of our study, Harkunver Shethani showed great determination in participating in the public sphere of the city. She was fortunate in having an erudite and committed reference group. It included

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\(^{54}\) Ibid, p.21
\(^{55}\) Ibid
\(^{56}\) Maganlal Vakhatchand, *Amdavad No Itihaas*, Ahmedabad, 1851, p.150 (Gujarati)
\(^{57}\) Makrand Mehta and Shririn Mehta - ‘Harkunver Shethani, Gujarat’s First Female Social Reformer’, *Kumar*, Nov., 1955, p.540. (Gujarati)
the poet Dalpatram, the local historian Maganlal Vakhatchand, and Bhogilal Pranavallabhdas, the headmaster of the government high school. In Dalpatram’s own words, “At that time, T.B. Curtis was the secretary of Gujarat Vernacular Society and I, the Assistant Secretary. To collect donations for the society I used to meet the Sheths of the city. In this connection, I used to discuss social issues with Harkunver Shethani.”

Harkunver Shethani found it prudent to get the community’s approval for her varied activities. She spent huge sums to maintain and renovate temples and to organise pilgrimages. Alongwith a friend, Jyotibai, she set up a school in 1855, at the cost of Rs. 20,000/-. Sanskrit, Prakrit and Astrology were taught to boys and girls. She got built steps at the mountain shrine of Shretrunjo for the pilgrims.

One of the characteristics of the British period was the secularisation of charities. Harkunver Shethani contributed Rs. 12,000/- to the G.V.S. for its schools. Alongwith other prominent ladies of the city – Aaliben Kurshedji, Mahipatram’s wife, Parvati Kunver, Maganbhai Karamchand’s daughter, Samrath, the city Collector’s wife, Mrs. Chamberlain, and the wives of Gopal Hari Deshmukh and Satyendranath Tagore, she would visit the schools where girls were taught geography, history, gujarati, maths, embroidery and the garba dance.

Not everybody approved of a widow participating in public life. When Mary Carpenter visited Ahmedabad in 1867-1868, she took the opportunity to visit Harkunver’s school and saw 80 girls from 6 years to 11

58 Buddhiprokash, April 1878, pp 83-85.
59 Buddhiprokash, March 1859, p.48.
60 S.P.Vallabhi, op.cit., p.246.
61 Makrand Mehta, ‘Sketch of Three Widows of the nineteenth Century.’ Paryay, Jan – June, 1995, p.4 (Gujarati)
62 For details, Gujarat Shalapatra, Jan. to Sept., 1868.
63 There were articles on such themes in Buddhiprokash, July 1889, pp.148-49, Sept. 1895, pp.269-72.
years being educated there. Many among them were young widows. Mary Carpenter wrote, “I was very impressed to see that some eighty girls between the age of 6 to 11, were studying in Harkunverbai’s female school. There were also widows who had come for training to teach in the schools. I was pleased to see that the girls and widows were anxious to gain their livelihood in this manner.”

Mary Carpenter put forward one criticism that the teachers were predominantly male. So, Harkunver and her friends started work to train females as teachers as it would help to attract more girl students. Hence, in 1870 the female training college was started. It was renamed as ‘Mahalakshmi Female Training College’ in 1874, after the noted millowner, Bechardas Laskari made a hefty donation.

Harkunver built many hospices for animals. Alongwith Nagarsheth Premabhai Himabhai, she started a hospital, where the poor were given free treatment. People flocked to the hospital from the nearby villages. Many English doctors worked at the hospital. Lord and Lady Elphinstone attended the hospital’s inauguration and were full of praise for Harkunver Shethani.

The Bombay Government presented Harkunver Shethani with a gold medal for her charity work and the title of ‘The Honourable Bahadur’ on June 12, 1856. It was mentioned in the official gazette, in the following terms, “No king or queen in this country has shown so much generosity as

66 Buddhiprakash, 1855, September
Harkunverbai and this title suits her eminently." The Gaekwad of Baroda also gifted her a shawl and palanquin and the title of 'Chaubdar'.

Whichever ruling group had controlled the city, be it the Mughals or Marathas, the local notables always managed to forge personal bonds with them. But with the British model of bureaucratic government, durbar-style politics and forging clientele ties through gift giving became increasingly difficult. Fostered by feelings of cultural superiority, the colonial elite fashioned a distinct Anglo-Indian society where the subjects had no place. For the British, their private lives where they interacted with their fellow country-men was separate from their public, professional dealings with Indian subordinates. Based on European social clubs, a distinct British set of sites emerged – tennis, polo, ballroom dancing and social drinking. Their very exclusivity kept the Indians out. Regulations prohibiting officials' attending "complimentary entertainments of a formal and public character" blocked Indians from creating social occasions of their own that would include the governing elite. In their work places, civil servants were to dispense their justice with impartiality and without regard to friendships or ties of affections; it became inappropriate for any official to maintain his own personal hangers-on. For civil servants, presents were bribes and so, unacceptable. The empire no longer needed the finances of wealthy merchants. Gifts might be useful to curry favours with lower officials but were no longer a public expression of an effective tie with a powerful person.

During the late nineteenth century, philanthropy emerged as an important means of establishing an identity as a person worthy of imperial recognition - and no wonder, the notables adopted it wholeheartedly. For

67 Buddhiprakash, 1856.
68 S.P.Vallabhji, Ibid, p.240
69 Haynes, op.cit, p.114
urban sheths, philanthropy became the means to translate portions of their
capital, the resource they possessed in great abundance into authoritative
relations with the British rulers at a time when tribute had become
stigmatised as bribery. Influential locals now began donating to public
causes – education, health-care, the building of public facilities like
gardens, fountains etc. Relief work became significant in times of plague,
famines or floods, after the 1860s. Such displays of public munificence
helped the local magnates gain access to the colonial rulers. However,
religious patronage was still important to them, the roots of their local
status. 70

The British civil servants approved of philanthropy for Victorian
values placed a high premium on private affairs to improve human welfare.
David Owen observed, “For most Englishmen, the hundreds of charitable
institutions in Britain represented one of the glories of the British teacher
and stood as a monument to the superiority of voluntary actions over state
interventions.” 71 British officers in Indian districts, hoping to promote an
ethos, which they believed had contributed to the advancement of their
own civilization, sometimes came to regard the stimulation of private
benevolence by wealthy merchants and landlords as a part of their official
duties. The officials urged that the money lavishly spent on marriages and
religious ceremonies be used for more productive purposes. “Far better it
is to lay out your riches on such lasting objects than to waste them on
fireworks, in music and other extravagances and yet I am assured that the
annual expenditures in the city on fireworks is probably as great as will be
required for the memorial” (school fund in memory of Edward VII). 72

70 Ibid, p.121.
THE NATIVE INDUSTRIAL BOURGEOISIE

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of an indigenous industrial bourgeoisie, due to the convergence of socio-economic forces in colonial Gujarat. The growth of the cotton mill industry in India was “pioneered, financed and managed substantially by Indians from its beginnings in Bombay in the 1850s.” Though Bombay and Ahmedabad emerged as major centres of capitalist industrialisation in Western India there were marked differences in their socio-economic transformation. In Ahmedabad, foreign capital was insignificant.

The main channels of capital utilisation in Ahmedabad were usury and speculation, after the handicraft industry, witnessed a slump in the nineteenth century. Generally it may be said that the first impulse of the professional capitalist is to put his money out of usury. Even the cultivator does this though he confines his transactions to relatives and very intimate acquaintances. Many of the wealthy Jains and Meshri Banias provided the money to village moneylenders and dealers to conduct their commercial operations. A substantial proportion of the important banking firms were mainly concerned with the provision of loans to lower, second category of bankers who were located in the towns and bigger villages.

Besides advancing loans, banks employed their capital for purchase and sales of bills of exchange; insurance, buying cotton on behalf of business in Bombay and other commercial centres; speculation in cotton

73 According to Buchanann’s study, (1934), India possessed the fifth highest number of spindles in the world, ranked fourth in the consumption of raw cotton and third in the total labour force - 3,80,000 workers; D.H.Buchanann, The Development of Capitalist Enterprise In India, London, 1966, p.19
76 Ibid, p.64.
77 Ibid,p.64
and gambling. Speculation and gambling exercised such appeal that some of the capital was drawn away from trade and a substantial proportion of the city's business capital was employed in gambling. Speculative activity extended to other spheres, such as land around Ahmedabad, which was purchased by urban dwellers. Also, non-productive activities like hoarding of ornaments and old coins, kept some capital locked.

With the British banning market speculation and the opium trade contracting, the greater availability of metallic currency and improved communication with Bombay – such measures impinged upon previously lucrative sources of profit, which increasingly offered diminishing returns.

Apart from the traditional channels of business, investments in land were also curtailed. During the British administration, several factors obstructed the merchants endeavour to gain control over land. In the ryotwari areas, holdings were diffused and managing them was prohibitive. It was also difficult to dislodge powerful zamindars. In response to peasant opposition and suspicion of large landholders, the colonial administration legally prevented acquisition of land by "non-agriculturists" in the Bombay Presidency, United Provinces and Punjab. By 1901, in Ahmedabad, big traders were reluctant to invest in land and only few merchants ventured to procure land and set up as non-cultivating landlords.

A substantial portion of land in Ahmedabad District was under the control of the landlords. In the rural areas, the patidar community strengthened its hold over land, during the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

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78 Ibid, p.66.
79 Ibid p.67.
82 Gillian, op.cit, p.79.
centuries. Both the Mughals and Marathas entrusted the collection of land taxes to the leva kanbis, (later patidars) and they gradually increased their spheres of influence. Among, he patidars control over land represented an important means for enhancing prestige, and the community was sometimes prone to severe conflicts over inheritance and landed property.

Despite the political turbulence of the eighteenth century, the indigenous civic and business institutions – the Nagarsheth and Mahajan, the family and partnership firms etc. remained intact. James Forbes, an English official, witnessed the exodus of the artisans and workers from the city. “Long wars, unstable and oppressive governments and fluctuations of human establishments have brought Ahmedabad to a state of decay.” On the other side, Ahmedabad could still boast of numerous wealthy merchants – Vakhatcand, Hathising Kesrisingh, Ambaidas Lashkari, Jivan Nagji, and Karamchand Premchand. They financed the indigenous manufacturers of Ahmedabad. They advanced loans to the Peshwas and the Gaekwads and also to the feudal chiefs of Kathiawar and Rajasthan. They had their business branches in Bombay, Malwa, Baroda, Poona, Calcutta, Jaipur, and Delhi – cities of commercial and political importance. Hathising Kesrising owned ships, which regularly sailed to Chinese ports and participated in the flourishing opium trade.

The city possessed a strong business tradition, whose elites dominated the city’s civic life. Also, the commercial activities of the city had a sound industrial base, reinforced by the artisan’s panches (guilds).

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84 Hardiman, Ibid, p.44.
86 Uttamram, Amdavad Nu Varnan, Ahmedabad 1853, pp 49-50, D. Sampat, Pratapi Purvajo, Bhavnagar, 1945, pp.72-155. (Gujarati)
87 D. Sampat, Ibid, pp 114-17.
The Marathas had retained the Mughal bureaucratic traditions and continued to extend their patronage to some of the local administrative elites, who later on constituted the core of the power structure of the city, having a population of 80,000 in 1814.\textsuperscript{88} The artisans, weavers, spinners, blacksmiths, paper manufacturers, potters etc. though well organised, did not enjoy much influence in the power structure.

To help govern the city, the British required and sought the cooperation of the influential merchants/bankers. The latter welcomed their overtures for they had considerable experience getting along with ruling elites.\textsuperscript{89} The British supported the merchant’s property rights. The government dealt firmly with marauders and tightened security, systematized the collection of octroi (duties on imports and exports of the city) and all customary private levies on goods were commuted to fixed cash allowances.\textsuperscript{90} Maganlal Vakhalchand has noted that the new safety measures boosted the investment climate. The town people took to buying and selling of land and constructed houses and shops for their own use or for rental. \textit{Nagarsheth} Vakhchand Hemabhai (1785-1858), Hathising Kesrising (1796-1846), and Maganbahi Karamchand (1825-64) purchased large estates and constructed houses on the British pattern.\textsuperscript{91}

English yarn and cloth were introduced in the city in 1818.\textsuperscript{92} However, the poorer sections purchased local production, however inferior and proportionately expensive to European fabrics.\textsuperscript{93} There were not less than 300 shops in the town dealing in coarse \textit{dhoties} and other varieties of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{88} Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, Vol. IV, 1879, pp 292-93.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Makrand Mehta, \textit{The Ahmedabad Cotton Textile Industry, Genesis and Growth}, New Order Book Co, Ahmedabad, 1982, p6. In 1780, when General Goddard launched an assault on the city, the Nagarsheth Nathusha Kushalchand pleaded with him, “Sir, we remained faithful to the Peshwas. Now that you and the Gaekwad have become our masters, we are faithful to you.” This prevented the loot of the city. H. G. Briggs, \textit{The Cities of Gurjarashtra}, London, 1849, p.213.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Kenneth Gillian, op.cit., pp43-46.
\item \textsuperscript{91} Maganlal Vakhatchand, op.cit., pp 135-136. He characterized British Rule as ‘Ram-Rajya’.
\item \textsuperscript{92} H.C.Briggs, op.cit., pp117.
\item \textsuperscript{93} Ibid, p133.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
cloth. In the 1840s, Ahmedabad had about 100 establishments engaged in the weaving of turbans, 50 in the manufacturing and sale of carpets and 70 shops producing and marketing silk goods. Brocade was exported to Bombay, Baroda, Poona, Gwalior, Rajputana, Sindh, Afghanistan, Iran, China and the Arab world. That Mashru (cloth with cotton weft and silk warp) was still produced in large quantities can be inferred from the fact that in the 1840s more than 300 city traders held this articles. The members of the Nagarsheth family (Hemabhai, son Premabhai, his son-in-law, Harthising Kersrising) carried their cloth business on an extensive scale. A contemporary Jain source says that they exported a variety of textile goods to Surat, Poona, Bombay, Delhi, Agra, Rajasthan and Bengal.

Ranchodlal Chotalal, a Sathodara Nagar Brahmin, whose career and social background in government service was contradictory to the prevalent mercantile traditions of the city, pioneered the cotton textile industry of Ahmedabad. His family had no commercial background, the Nagar community being more politically active. Ranchodlal Chotalal's parents' families had held high administrative positions under the Mughals and Marathas.

As early as 1847, Ranchodlal had investigated the possibility of starting textile manufacturing in India, but his initial attempts at convincing the well-entrenched bankers and merchants to invest in his venture were unsuccessful as the former were orthodox in their economic ideas. Also, a legal ban existed on importing textile machinery from

95 Ibid.
96 For details see, Buddhisagarji, Jain Rasmala, Part I, Ahmedabad, 1913, p.23.
Britain, prior to 1843. The machine manufacturers campaigned to lift the ban. But as the indigenous merchants got satisfactory returns on their existing investments, they were hesitant to enter new fields, despite cooperation from machine manufacturers in London.\textsuperscript{100}

However, Ranchodlal’s efforts proved fruitful and he set up a joint stock company in 1850, with a lakh of rupees as capital. Dadabhai Naoroji helped him to purchase the machinery.\textsuperscript{101} The Ahmedabad Cotton Mill began production in 1861 with 2500 spindles, which increased to 10,000 spindles in 1864-65; a weaving plant was set up with 100 looms and it produced coarse cloth. The workforce increased from 63 workers to 500 by 1867-68. In the first year, the company declared a dividend of 6 percent, though below the usual rates of interest, prevailing in the city.\textsuperscript{102}

Bechardas Ambaidas Laskari, a \textit{kanbi} by caste, set up the Bechardas Spinning & Weaving Mill, which began production in 1867. The Mughals had granted his family, two villages in perpetuity. His father had been a banker, who collaborated with the East India Company by providing goods and credit.\textsuperscript{103}

The industry’s profile started changing when the established castes entered the field. This can be traced from 1878, when Mansukhbhai Bhagubhai, a \textit{Visa Porwad Jain}, set up the Gujarat Spinning and Weaving Mill, subsequently, his family set up three more mills.\textsuperscript{104} Initially, there was religious protest, as Jainism forbids the killing of living creatures and manufacturing carried that risk; but later on, profits mattered. Maganbhai Karamchand, a \textit{Dasa Shrimali Jain}, bought a calico mill in 1880. In the

\textsuperscript{100} Salim Lakha, op.cit., p.64
\textsuperscript{101} Gillian, op.cit., pp 84-85.
\textsuperscript{102} Makrand Mehta, op.cit., 1982, pp54-7.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, pp64-6.
1890s, the *Visa Oswal Jains*, entered the industry, including Kasturbhai Manubhai and Lalbhai Dalpatbhai, (whose son Kasturbhai Lalbhai, a leading mill owner, left his mark on local and national politics). The family was descended from the elite merchant of Mughal India, Shantidas Jhaveri, the famous Ahmedabad jeweller to the Mughal court, whose interests extended to both brokerage and banking.\[^{105}\]

The *Vaishnavas* too ventured into textile manufacturing, investing their wealth accumulated through trade in raw cotton. In 1888, Harilal Harivallbhadas and four associates set up the Trikamlal Harilal Spinning and Manufacturing Company in partnership. In 1893, Seth Trikamal Jamnadas, a *Panch Nagar Vania*, started the Manek Chowk and Ahmedabad Manufacturing Company. Some of the early industrialist like Mangaldas Parekh and Balabhai Shodhan (*Vaishnava Banias*) came from more humble backgrounds. The rise of individuals from relatively modest origins was facilitated by assistance from established mill owners, the small close-knit nature of the agencies managing the mills and caste ties.\[^{106}\]

Subsequently, the control of the Ahmedabad Cotton Textile Industry was confined to *Jains* and *Vaishnava Vanias* the traditional mercantile community of the city. To illustrate, in 1898, of the 25 textile mills in the city, more than half were controlled by *Vaishnavas* and less than a third by *Jains*. The remaining was under Ranchodlal, *Nagar*, Bechardas *Kanbi* and Sorabji Karaka (Parsi). Over the years, the *Vaishnavas* came to dominate the cotton mill industry in Ahmedabad.\[^{107}\]


\[^{106}\] Spodek, op.cit., p.486.

\[^{107}\] Ibid, p.490.
The emergence of the industrial bourgeoisie had profound economic and social consequences in Ahmedabad. The growth of a collective identity among the industrialists widened their sphere of class influence. Their internal social cohesion was advanced through marriage ties linking different families and also through business cooperation.\textsuperscript{108} Such cooperation was symbolised by Ranchodlal's presence at the opening of every mill in Ahmedabad. The collective identity of the mill owners received major expression in 1891 with the establishment of the Mill owners' Association of Ahmedabad, which had Ranchodlal Chotalal as its first President. Bombay had set up a similar institution in 1875. In 1894, the founding of the Ahmedabad Stock Exchange facilitated capital generation for Ahmedabad mills from small investors and depositors.\textsuperscript{109}

The improved social status of the \textit{Vaishnawas} was clear from the fact that the head of the cloth dealers' guild, a \textit{Vaishnawa Vania} came to be known as the Chautano Sheth (head of the cloth market) as distinct from the head of the \textit{sharaf mahajan} (banker's guild). The \textit{Nagarsheth} was the head of the \textit{sharaf mahajan}. That the \textit{Vaishnawa Vania} were emerging as a powerful rival business group is clear from the fact that the \textit{Nagarsheth} (a \textit{Jain}) who had been traditionally accepted as the leader of the city considered it expedient to consult the \textit{Chautano Sheth} on important matters affecting the city.\textsuperscript{110}

Enterprising merchants made attempts to introduce a degree of innovation into production methods. To illustrate a Muslim merchant developed a new process for weaving \textit{masru}, which resulted in a better quality product.\textsuperscript{111} Some merchants tried to produce \textit{masru} from machine

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, p.488.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, p.486.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency}. Vol.IV, p.131.
\textsuperscript{111} Vakhatchand, op.cit., p.168.
made yarn but it failed. Around 1848, they set up indigenous cotton spinning machine, an improvement upon the rentias or spinning wheels and it turned out yarn in much larger quantities. But the staple tended to break off during manufacturing. Optimistically, Vakhatchand wrote, “the defects of the machine will soon be mended, for who is ever so mighty as to resist the invasion of industrialisation.”

However, the textile industry could not make much headway; it was badly affected by famines, plagues and cholera. Also, its performance nose-dived when the colonial government imposed heavy excise duties on the indigenous production of yarn in 1896. Labour strikes in February 1895 and August 1896, brought the mills to a standstill for eight days. The mill agents were also held responsible for the sad plight of the mill industry. The press reflected the wide spread anger of the investors, doctors, lawyers, teachers, traders, shopkeepers and government servants. The shareholders doubted the integrity of some of the mill agents and exposed the “atrocities of this new class of shylocks.” The mill agents were accused of misappropriating funds, nepotism, manipulating balance sheets and dubious investments.

Despite such setbacks, the influence of mill owners continued to permeate the social and cultural spheres of the city. The prevalent caste and sect groupings aided this process. In 1903, the Vaishnavas established the Gujarat Vaishya Sabha, the mill owners controlling the various positions. The primary objective was the diffusion of a business ethos. The Sabha initiated myriad activities to diffuse its influence – cultural

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115 *Prajabandhu*, March 20,1898, p.7.
meetings, scholarships, conferences, hostels for needy students and vocational training which placed young men in mills or indigenous banking businesses.\textsuperscript{117}

The Jains had a fairly long tradition of organisation – symbolized by the founding in the 1720s of the trust under the name ‘Anandji Kalyanji’ which ranked among the top charitable and religious bodies in the country.\textsuperscript{118} Other Jain organizations were formed, the \textit{Shravak Sangh} (\textit{shravak} was a Jain monk) in 1895 and the Jain Shwetambar Conference in 1902.\textsuperscript{119} The former was initiated by Mansukhbhai Bhagubhai and Lalbhai Dalpatbhai to address issues facing the community.

The dominant presence of the mill owners was not confined to community organizations but even extended to Ahmedabads’ civic institutions. Prior to the establishment of local self-government, the government nominated members for the municipal management and normally such honour fell upon the city’s prominent citizens.\textsuperscript{120} Hence, Ranchodlals’ appointment to the municipality in 1869 was very natural. In 1883, he became permanent chairman of the Municipal Council and President of the Municipality in 1885. He made efforts to improve sanitation in the city and curb the death rate. He was held in high esteem for his charity in religious, medical and educational fields.

The Muslims too were very much part of the civil landscape of the city. In Dec. 1884, “the Anjuman-e-Islam” was set up.\textsuperscript{121} The founders were K.S.Bawamiya, Mahipatram Rupram and Lalshanker Umiyashanker. Mahipatram and Burhanuddin Abdulmiya became the secretaries.\textsuperscript{122} In

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117} M. Mehta, 1982, op.cit., p.104.
\item \textsuperscript{118} D. Tripathi, 1981, op.cit., pp 198-201.
\item \textsuperscript{119} M. Mehta, op.cit., pp 101-02.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Bhagwanlal Badshah, \textit{The Life of Rao Bahadur Ranchorelal Chotalal}, Bombay, 1899, p.37.
\item \textsuperscript{121} I am grateful to Prof. Makrand Mehta for drawing my attention to this aspect.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Makrand Mehta, “Anjuman-e-Islam, Symbol of Communal Amity”, \textit{Naya Marg}, Sept. 16, 1995, p.12. (Gujarati)
\end{itemize}
1885, an Urdu school and library were set up for boys. In 1887, an English medium and girls school were opened. In a densely populated Muslim area, Popatiyawadi, a girl’s school came up in 1893. Initially, there were only 40 girls but by 1893, the number went up threefold. Scholarships were issued and the attendance increased in the society’s library and reading rooms.123

Both Hindus and Muslims cooperated to raise funds for the society’s new school building at Pankor Naka in 1887. Lalshanker took over as the secretary after Mahipatram’s demise in 1891 and worked tirelessly to set up the Burhannudin Madrasa. The Revenue Commissioner Reid, the President of Anjuman, Mr. Frost, Ranchodlal Chotalal, and the President of the municipality, Asst. Collector, Barristers, the Nagarsheth Mayabhai Premabhai, the Kazi, mill owners and 200 other guests inaugurated it. In his inaugural address, Mr. Reid felicitated the Anjuman for its work and the cooperation of the Hindu brothers in the pioneering efforts to spread education among Muslims. He commented that other places too should emulate such work.124

The cause of religious and social reforms was matters of public debate in Ahmedabad. The leading luminaries in the social reform movements were Bholanath Sarabhai and Mahipatram Rupram (Vadnagar Brahmins, whose ancestors were able administrators and scholars under the Mughals, Marathas and the British). Both were government servants. Mahipatram was an officer in the Education Department, who became principal of the Gujarat Training College in 1861 after having been sent to England in 1860 to study teachers’ training colleges there. He was a cause celebre because of his breach of caste rules in crossing the waters. They set up the Gujarat Hindu Social Reform Association to campaign against child marriages and the ban on widow remarriage. The prominent mill owners contributed to the cause, through the endowment of girls’ schools,

124 Ibid.
efforts to liberalize their caste rules and the substitution of more worthy charities for the extravagant caste dinners. 125

Gradually, the courts undermined the powers of the mahajans. Hopkins observed in 1896, that although the guilds were still vigorous in Ahmedabad, their power was declining. They tended to admit outsiders more readily and to become more formal in their organization. There were now constitutions and elected officers and more internal democracy, with less control by the hereditary sheths. The caste reform associations tended to lose their more restrictive and coercive aspects and to become more of an agency for mutual help. By 1911, there had been a weakening of the control of caste panchayats over such matters as marriages, maintenance etc. The authority of the Vaishnava maharajas was also in decline.126 However, not many were willing to challenge caste authority. Even a brave heart like Mahipatram Rupram had to appease his caste brethren for daring to cross the forbidden seas. However, the limited qualitative transformation helped to evolve a new social structure based on achievement, secular legal-rational norms.127

Thus, along with the notables, the philanthropic activities of the industrial bourgeoisie helped them to acquire a new civic identity, as representatives of public opinion. Acting as pressure groups, they endeavoured to make imperial authority cognoscenti of their concerns and the concerns of their followers. While they usually lacked formal schooling in English, they acquired the ability to couch their discourse, in a manner meaningful to both the officials and their followers.

125 Gillian, op.cit., p.66.
127 Neera Desai, op.cit., p.536.
The extensive involvement of the notables and the emergent industrial bourgeoisie with public good helped them to earn greater public recognition in the imperial circles. This enhanced their status and political leverage. Officials acknowledged magnates with records of secular munificence as advanced members of their communities with a special role to play, in the political education of the city’s residents. Prominent philanthropists were consulted on important affairs of the city, such as maintaining law and order and enforcing municipal regulations. A few were nominated as municipal councillors and as honorary magistrates. Philanthropy led to honours from the British administration and to a certain degree of solidarity with British officials. The government acknowledged donors by erecting plaques of honour on public buildings and granting titles to those with the most substantial records of civic munificence.¹²⁸

The emergence of persons with substantial secular schooling and exposure to English political traditions presented a real challenge to the privileged position of the notables and magnates. The English educated politicians were able to use their mastery over the idiom of public politics to outflank and undermine the power of the former in the civic arena. In the course of this challenge, the new elite reshaped the basic forms of public culture, fashioning the contours of a liberal representative polity.

The notion of public leadership – historically based on the challenges of commoners to aristocratic privileges was potentially open to a wider public. But in practice was limited to people with advanced English education that had the necessary vocabulary to participate in public discourse. The new elite only commanded a marginally wider space than the notables.

The professionals – lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers, who returned to the city, with the knowledge acquired during their schooling, found that their talents were not only required professionally but they were also called upon to act as spokesmen of local groups who wished to influence government policy. The sophisticated and mystifying rules of municipal procedure, and the need for effective rhetoric to appeal for rights and privileges were beyond the scope of traditional leaders. Armed with the indispensable knowledge of the foreign rulers’ language, these professionals were able to negotiate their way through the minefield of specialised procedural knowledge of imperial law and justice. It is also argued that these symbolic specialists, the English educated politicians, came to assume great significance as “brokers”\(^\text{129}\) in many areas. Slowly they expanded the scope of their activity, establishing new institutions and a new style of communicating with the ruling group.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, there emerged on the political firmament, a handful of people who sought to fashion a new collective identity as public leaders – with a difference, as ones who cared about the welfare of the entire urban citizenry, who represented the interests of the people and who identified with India as a nation. They tried to enlarge the contours of civic life by demanding more schools for girls and boys, articulating the farmer’s issues and pressurising the government on behalf of the urban people. In their encounters with the colonial world, the public leaders endeavoured to overcome their narrow parochial caste and community ties and espouse the cause of the entire city.

\(^\text{129}\) The interpretation of the Cambridge school has tended to view such persons as acting as sort of linkage between powerful patrons and the new political arenas established by the British.

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The vocabulary of these public leaders contained the following context. The reformist agenda, in consonance with the imperial goal of transforming India into a modern, industrial society. To advocate the cause of the entire city, overlapping the descent based social groups of the city was the popular agenda. And for the first time recognizing the nascent nationalist sentiments, the identification with India as a nation, was the nationalist dimension. And the interplay of these three dimensions was reflected in the dealings between the imperial rulers and the public leaders.130

THE SWADESHI PHASE AND THE NATIONALISTS.

In the context of the Indian freedom struggle, Ravinder Kumar argued that the communities rather than classes generated the unifying forces at the local level. This is because the institutions and the solidarities, mediate between the individual, and the class to which he ideally belonged, shaping his social loyalties and moulding his political behaviour.131

In Ahmedabad, there were no sharp cleavages between the business class and the emergent middle-class. In spite of the development of the cotton mill industry, the mill owners remained moored in the old mercantile tradition, from which they had risen. Perhaps, this explains the lack of fissures between the attitudes of the industrial bourgeoisie towards the freedom struggle and that of other sections of the middle-class.

The British rule created objective conditions for the emergence of the new social classes comprising mill owners, and Western educated lawyers, government officials, medical practitioners, teachers and small

131 Ravinder Kumar, Essays in the Social History of Modern India, New Delhi, 1983, p.239.
traders.\textsuperscript{132} Since the 1840s, despite their caste loyalties, they actively promoted secular institutions, libraries, hospitals, orphanages, and schools for boys & girls. The beneficiaries of these institutions along with the local elites initially believed in the progressive characteristics of the Raj. They shared whatever benefits accrued from the colonial patronage system, jobs, government titles, lands, education, civic facilities, hospitals and other riches.\textsuperscript{133}

However, the business and social groups were also aware of the exploitative nature of British rule. As early as 1861, a few months after the inauguration of Ranchodlal’s first mill, \textit{Buddhiprakash} published an article explaining how the British textile manufacturers were using influence to facilitate the import of Indian cotton into Britain and supply finished goods in India. The article stressed Indians to pick up technical skills.\textsuperscript{134} In the following years, many such articles were published advocating the use of indigenous products and new methods for manufacturing them.\textsuperscript{135}

R.Chotalal, V.R.Gandhi, G.H.Deshmukh, A.S.Desai and Hargovinddas Kantawala founded the Swadeshi Udyog Vardhak Mandali at Ahmedabad in 1875.\textsuperscript{136} Along with holding lectures and publishing articles and pamphlets, the Mandali also held exhibitions of indigenously made good. To illustrate, Kantawala exhibited soaps and locks made at Broach and Jamnagar in 1876. But a proper marketing network was lacking.\textsuperscript{137} Shops for selling India-made goods were opened in Ahmedabad, Surat, Bharuch, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Nadiad and Baroda with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{134} \textit{Buddhiprakash}, Dec.1861, pp 282-88.
\item \textsuperscript{135} \textit{Buddhiprakash}, Nov.1875, pp 20-21, Dec.1876, pp 265-70, June 1878, pp 137-40, June 1886, pp 122-27, Jan.1888, pp 1-4, March 1894, pp 75-76.
\item \textsuperscript{136} \textit{Buddhiprakash}, Nov 1875, pp 20-21.
\item \textsuperscript{137} \textit{Buddhiprakash}, Dec 1876, pp 265-70.
\end{itemize}
the Mandali’s efforts.\textsuperscript{138} The Mandali organized exhibitions of indigenous goods and provided guidance and services to those interested in setting up indigenous enterprises.\textsuperscript{139}

In the political sphere, the city’s businessmen, advocates and medical practitioners exhibited a spirit of consensus. The nationalist influence as well as the possibility of safeguarding and enhancing their economic interests led the middle class professionals, mostly lawyers, to set up a political organization in 1884. This was the Gujarat Sabha founded by Bhaishanker Nanabhai, Hargovinddas Kantawala, Ambalal Desai, Ramanbhai Nilkanth, Jivanlal Desai, Joseph Benjamin (native Jew), and Jatashanker Liladhar, the last two being medical practitioners. The mill owners secretly supplied it with funds, without any formal links with it. When the Indian National Congress was set up in 1885, the Sabha regularly sent delegates to its annual sessions. It also took up the cause of the textile industry.

The Gujarat Sabha had a moderate agenda. Its timid nature was criticised by the nationalist the press as an “ultra-loyalist institution”.\textsuperscript{140} The Sabha proved its loyalist credentials by refusing to criticize British policies, condemning the plague deaths in Bombay Presidency. It gave more prominence to laud its leading member Ambalal Desai; being conferred the title of Diwan Bahadur in January 1900. The \textit{Nagarsheth}, Manibhai Premabhai attended the function and the invitees included mill owners, Mangaldas Girdhardas, Balabhai Damodardas, Mansukhbhai

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Prajatandhu}, Dec.17, 1899, p-2.

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Bhagubhai, Lalbhai Dalpatbhai and front-ranking advocates like Ramanbhai Nilkanth, Jivanlal Desai and Govindrao Apaji Patel.\textsuperscript{141}

The political elite had shares and deposits in the cotton mills. The Secretary of Gujarat Sabha, Govindraw Patel held shares of the Aryodaya and Rajnagar mills owned by the Mangaldas Girdhardas. Apart from investing in the mills, advocates like Ramanbhai Nilkanth, Mulchand Shah and Jivanlal Desai offered professional consultancy to the mills. No wonder, they remained indifferent when the unorganised mill workers struck works in February 1895, protesting the terrible working conditions. After 10 days, the workers capitulated to the owners.\textsuperscript{142} On another occasion, the Gujarat Sabha passed a resolution condemning the income tax bill in view of the heavy recession in the textile mill industry.\textsuperscript{143}

The friendly alliance between the textile magnates and professionals helped their political agenda. This was reflected when Phirozeshah Mehta, Chimanlal Setalvad and Dinshaw Wacha, the Bombay based moderates visited Ahmedabad in March, 1902 to hold discussions with them for the proposed session of the Congress at Ahmedabad. Discussions were held with the Gujarat Sabha members. The mill owners were contacted for the proposed industrial exhibition to be held during the session. The exhibition was to display mill-made yarn, textile goods and handicraft products. Mr.J.N.Tata was also requested to spare the premises of his mill for the Congress session.\textsuperscript{144} A joint delegation of the Sabha members and the mill owners met Mr.Lely, Commissioner of the Northern Division, to garner support for the industrial delegation. Mr.Lely lent his patronage. However, he wanted to know whether supporting the exhibition also meant extending

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, 28 Jan., 1900, p-5.  
\textsuperscript{143} Prajabandhu, Dec.17, 1899, p-2.  
\textsuperscript{144} Prajabandhu, 11th May, 1902, p-8.
support to the Congress. The Commissioner’s query was on behalf of the native princes and other friends of the empire who had expressed their apprehensions about using the Congress platform for industrial exhibition. The millowner and the Secretary of the exhibition committee, P. M. Hutheesing assured Lely that such support did not mean any ‘approval or otherwise of the political views of the Congress.’\textsuperscript{145} The native newspaper Prajabandhu, criticised such timid behaviour.\textsuperscript{146}

The leader of the Gujarat Sabha Ambalal Sakarlal Desai, a staunch anti-Tilakite, welcomed the British for its progressive ideas and its role in the economic progress of India.\textsuperscript{147} In his address to the Congress delegates, Ambalal Desai observed, “Gentlemen, as you enter the city, you must have noticed the tall chimneys on both sides of the railway tracks. These are our textile mills. A large bulk of the mill company’s shares of this city is held by the city’s own householders and hence, the heavy duties imposed on the textile industry are unjustly borne by every householders of Ahmedabad.”\textsuperscript{148}

At the meeting of the Bharuch District Association in May 1906,\textsuperscript{149} Desai again criticised the British economic policies. This provoked the Commissioner who sought an explanation from Desai for he was a government pensioner and Diwan Bahadur. Desai defended himself that his criticism was directed against the native officials and not the government. He owned two mills at the time. “I have no reason to criticise British rule for I draw a handsome pension and own large property and estate.”\textsuperscript{150}

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\item \textsuperscript{145} Prajabandhu, Sept. 28, 1902, p-4.
\item \textsuperscript{146} Ibid, p-5.
\item \textsuperscript{147} Markand Mehta, op.cit., 1983, p-52.
\item \textsuperscript{148} V.S.Thakkar, \textit{Ambalal Sakarlal Desai na Bhashano \& Lekho}, Ahmedabad, 1942, pp-150, (Gujarati).
\item \textsuperscript{149} Ibid, pp.166-171.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Ibid, p.151.
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During the Swadeshi movement, Hargovinddas Kantawala, Ambalal Desai and Lalshankar Umiyashankar had set up textile mills. A lawyer and municipal member, Keshavlal Shah set up a metal factory.\textsuperscript{151} In 1905, the Gujarat Industrial Association was set up to promote \textit{Swadeshi} goods. The owners of mills, established prior to the Bengal Partition, took advantage of the prevailing tense emotional situation, which hiked the demand for \textit{Swadeshi} goods.\textsuperscript{152} Yet, even as the entire country was in ferment against Curzon’s policies, the Gujarat Sabha only dubbed such acts as ‘unfortunate’. Such an attitude was censured by the press, which remarked that the members of the Gujarat Sabha were like bees, which extracted nectar from the flower, using both the nationalist agitations and the British patronage system.\textsuperscript{153}

Patriotic aspirations were closely associated with the reformist agenda of the educated elite during the phase between 1900 and 1914. The leading reformers included Ramanbhai Nilkanth, Indulal Yagnik, Shardaben Mehta, Vidyaben Nilkanth and G.V.Mavlankar. Ansuyaben Sarabhai took up the cause of the female and child labourer in the family owned Calico Mills. But their activities had a limited appeal. For getting regular wages, the municipal sweepers, \textit{Bhangis} (untouchables) struck work in September 1911. But the reformers did not get involved even when the strike leaders were sentenced for one-month imprisonment.\textsuperscript{154} The reformers found it difficult to make a complete break from their caste moorings. Amrutlal Thakkar (popularly known as Thakkar Bapa), a member of the Servants of India Society made atonements for having

\textsuperscript{151} Prajabandhu, Dec.29, 1907, pp.17-18.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{153} Prajabandhu, March 5, 1905, p.11.
dined with the untouchables.\textsuperscript{155} Ramanbhai Nilkanth refused to appease his caste brethren but made it clear that the untouchables were dining in the next room.\textsuperscript{156}

Gandhi’s arrival in Ahmedabad and his setting up the Sabarmati Ashram in May 1915, led to a paradigmatic shift in the political, social and economic discourses of the city. Gandhi radicalized the moderate politics of the Gujarat Sabha. In 1916, the Sabha inducted Gandhi, Krishnalal Desai, G.V.Mavlankar and Shivabhai Patel as its Secretaries.\textsuperscript{157} Gandhi took the lead in the first session of the Gujarat Political Conference in 1917\textsuperscript{158} and the manner in which he led the Kheda Satyagraha and the mill workers’ strike changed the tenor of the Sabha.\textsuperscript{159} Before the Kheda Satyagraha, Vallabhbhai Patel had become an important member of the Sabha.

Addressing a meeting of the city businessmen in August 1917, Gandhi urged them not to remain aloof from politics as it also affected their economic interests. “If businessmen elsewhere start taking a livelier interest in political agitation, as you at Ahmedabad are doing, India is sure to achieve her aim.”\textsuperscript{160} Significantly, when the region was plagued by food insecurity and the influenza epidemic in 1918-19, industrialists like Kasturbhai Lalbhai and Mangaldas Girdhardas cooperated with Mavlankar Indubhai Yagnik, Vallabhbhai Patel and others to help the people. As the

\textsuperscript{159} Gandhi, \textit{Collected Works}, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid, p.510.

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press noted, “the feeling among the rural poor and the peasants that the rich businessmen have scant regard for them has now been vanishing.”

This feeling was amply justified when Vallabhbhai Patel entered municipal politics. He combined his professional acumen with a regard for public welfare. His attempts to improve the sanitation and water works of the city are discussed elsewhere. His impartiality while taking tough decisions, like the time when he persuaded the leading citizens (e.g. Khan Bahadur, First-Class Magistrate) to pay their pending municipal taxes was much appreciated. Though Vallabhbhai had no party following in the municipality, nevertheless he was able to secure approval for his schemes since they were recognized to be in the interests of the public and of the city.

The Municipality underwent a crisis during the Anti-Rowlatt and Non-cooperation agitations. As an institution established by law and supported by the Government, the latter would not tolerate any such support to political activities.

During the war, 1914-1918, textile profits shot up as imports from Lancashire were stopped. However, the people were undergoing hardships as food, clothing and kerosene were in short supply and there was a general rise in the prices. The distribution of grain was controlled which was not welcomed by the people. Coercive methods were used to make the people subscribe to the war loans or enlist in the armed forces. A general discontent with the government fuelled restlessness in the city.

161 Prajabandhu, May 9, 1920, p.7.
A branch of the Home Rule League initiated by Mrs. Besant and Tilak was set up in Ahmedabad in October 1916, though it enjoyed limited influence. However, it cooperated with the Gujarat Sabha in charity work during famines and epidemics. The government's prestige reached its nadir, due to its refusal to remit land revenue and had to make concessions under pressure. The success of the Kheda Satyagraha earned the Congress the invaluable support of the dominant and enterprising peasant caste, Lewa Patidars and increased its leverage in the city.

Meanwhile, Ahmedabad was not immune to the feverish excitement of the anti-Rowlatt movement in other cities. Vallabhbhai Patel, Indulal Yagnik and Kalidas Jaskaran addressed a mammoth crowd of over 50,000 on the bed of Sabarmati. The educated class was appalled at the draconian measures of the act, which were anti-thetical to the principles of self-government. The food shortages, price-rise and the control regime created widespread resentment.

News about Gandhi's arrest in 1919 led to widespread rioting in the city. Government property was the chief target. Rumours spread that Ansuyaben, the popular social worker was also arrested. The mob fury was unprecedented. Vallabhbhai told the Hunter Committee that he believed the rumour was deliberate in order to provoke the mill hands. During this period, the workers of twelve mills were on strike and 3000 workers had lost their jobs due to an industrial dispute. The Police Chief, Mr. Charfield testified that the concern of the workers on hearing about the arrests of Mr. Gandhi and Ansuyaben was personal and not political. Their ignorance, it was said was abused by lies and rumours.

166 Comments of Ambalal Sarabhai, Ibid, p.81.
The police undertook widespread arrests. Those tried before the special tribunal included, mill workers, labourers, cultivators, hawkers etc. The majority of the accused were acquitted due to lack of evidence.\textsuperscript{168} The entire exercise sheds more light on the working of the British system of law and justice.

Though, the government restored its formal authority, its moral hold over the people declined. The Congress occupied this space. Gandhi organised the mill workers in to the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association or \textit{Majur Mahajan}. The mill owners became staunch backers of the Congress and were the principal beneficiaries from \textit{Swadeshi}. Moreover, Gandhi’s ability to identify with the poorer sections of the society helped the intelligentsia to comprehend the issues of lower castes and the oppressed. They attained a certain measure of limited space denied to them earlier. This extended the political horizon of the city and skilfully linked city politics with rural and mass aspirations.

Though political discourse generally operated within the limits of alien political idioms, indigenous figures were constantly reshaping the meaning of appropriated concepts as they attempted to create places for themselves within the colonial order while simultaneously coming into conflict with it. Politics was an important battleground in which a wide variety of actors, Indian and British, contended with each other in construing meanings of the key symbols and vocabulary of public discourse.

"A society that tolerates the murder of innocents, or incitement to murder, as the interpretation of due and legitimate response, is a society that is breaking apart beyond all remedy".

Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka,
The Times of India,
December 2, 2002