SECTION I

THE PROBLEM AND ITS INVESTIGATION

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter II

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
All societies are constantly in transition. Every society has undergone a process of transformation witnessing change, be it political, economic, social, or cultural. The historical processes of modernization have formed and transformed traditional societies into what is called ‘modern’. These historical processes, in reality, have worked differently at different places and times according to respective conditions, history and culture (Singh 1977). Thus, scholars disagree on ‘modernization theory’ which fundamentally assumed that there was only one path of development, adopted by the developed nations as a universal model which all societies must follow and which leads sooner or later, to the same end (Doshi 2003).

Indian historical and cultural context was different. Modernization in India has its own history. Yogendra Singh (1994) traces the context of modernization in India in these words:

Modernization in India started with the western contact, especially though establishment of the British rule. This contact had a special historicity, which brought about many far-reaching changes in culture and social structure of the Indian society. The basic direction of this contact was towards modernization, but in the process a variety of traditional institutions also got reinforcement. This demonstrates the weakness of assuming a neat contrariety between tradition and modernity.

M.N. Srinivas (1966), Yogendra Singh (1994) and Dipankar Gupta (2000) who have discussed Indian modernity, have invariably discussed it in a bipolar way, i.e. modernity and tradition. Singh argues that modernity is a universal cultural phenomenon, whereas tradition is local and is observed by the immediate society only. The responses to universal features of modernity vary according to the tradition of each society. This gives rise to multiple modernities. Gupta, from a different point of view argues that modernity is not a monolithic block. The true modernity, in fact consists of ‘multiple modernities’. However, according to him the core feature of the attributes of modernity is the relations between people. These relations have to be characterized by equality with, and respect for others. It is the principle of democracy that all people should be considered equals and should therefore, have equal opportunities.
With the end of colonial rule, India as a sovereign state adopted its new path of development and modernization, and embraced equality as a central value. The elimination of inequality, and the establishment of a secular society envisaged in the Constitution would imply the dismantling of the prevailing caste structure (the Preamble to the Constitution states that the people of India have resolved to secure justice, liberty, and equality of status and opportunity). Guided by the Constitution, India has undergone a rapid and extensive transformation, political, social and economic to become the largest vibrant democracy and one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

Many questions remain unresolved, viz. what does this transformation of India mean to the marginalized sections of Indian society? What are the social implications of such a process for various groups and communities in India? Over the last few decades, India, known as the “land of villages” is steadily urbanising. The modernization processes have created urban centres as important destinations. Cities are perceived as places of diverse economic opportunities and of less constraint associated with traditional caste system and rural social order. Expecting opportunities for material growth and to overcome social disabilities, people of the marginalized communities from rural areas have been moving to urban areas. However, caste too has moved to cities, finding its importance in a different context.

This study begins with the assumption that caste remains a significant factor in the urban setting that affects the life-chances, especially of the traditionally marginalized caste groups. Thus, the study empirically investigates the ways in which the modern processes like urbanization, economic development, and political democracy, affect or influence the scavengers of the Bhangi caste in the city of Ahmedabad in continuing or altering their socio-economic position and what role does caste play in these processes.

**URBANIZATION, EXCLUSION AND IDENTITY**

**Urbanization and the City**

There is an agreement that historically, modernization came with the process of urbanization and industrialization. The twentieth century has been the century of
urbanization (Harvey 2004) and the level of urbanization of the world is said to be 47 per cent in the year 2000 (UNCHS 2001). Urbanization, which refers to a process, involves not merely the move from rural to urban areas but also the changes it brings to the population. It creates its distinct way of life characterized by certain standardized modes of behaviour, forms of organization, and values and norms which Wirth calls “urbanism” (Wirth 1938).

Urbanization is being accepted as ‘a way of life’ in modern societies characterized with heterogeneity of population, specialization of function, anonymity, impersonality and standardization of life and behaviour. In its complexities, urbanization has become an important index of material prosperity, socio-political progress and a hub of actions that brings high mobility. It is perceived that urbanization is a continuous and complex process that modernizes the material as well as the non-material dimensions of society. Davis has rightly remarked that, “urbanization represents a revolutionary change in the whole pattern of social life; itself a product of basic economy and technological development, it tends in turn, once it comes into being, to affect every aspect of existence” (Davis 1955: 429).

Urbanization is not a new phenomenon in India and neither is migration from rural to the urban center. In a way, the process of industrialization combined with many other reasons has increased the speed as well as the quantum of urbanization and the migration to the town and cities in India after independence. According to official sources, the level of urbanization in India was 17 per cent in 1950, and had gone up to around 28 per cent in the year 2000 and it will be 46 per cent in 2030 (UNCHS 1996, 2001). As Asish Bose (1965) has shown, the rate of urbanization, which implies the rate of rural-urban migration, was practically nil until 1911, and then it was slow till 1951. However, the Census data confirms a steady growth in India’s urban population; 20.22 per cent in 1971, 23.73 per cent in 1981, 25.72 per cent in 1991 and 27.78 per cent in 2001. The recent urbanization process involving a rapid expansion of urban areas and a remarkable rise in urban population has been ascribed to rural to urban migration (Davis 1962:1; Shahi 1989: 4).

The growth of modern industry from the late 18th century onward led to massive urbanization and the rise of new great cities, first in Europe and then in other regions, as new opportunities brought huge numbers of migrants from rural communities into urban areas. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were just 16 cities in the world with more
than a million people. By the year 2000, it was estimated, there may well be as many as 500 cities with more than a million inhabitants (Harvey 2004). In India too, urbanization today is perceived as a basic precondition for development and cities are seen as engines of economic growth. The rate of growth of small towns in India has been quite phenomenal. About one-third of urban India lives in million plus metropolitan cities. The number of such cities in India has increased from 1 in 1901 to 5 in 1951 to 23 in 1991. According to Census 2001 there are 35 metropolitan cities in India with a million plus population (Sivaramakrishnan et al 2005).

The increasing number of cities in the world and in India draws attention to their growing importance and the role they continue to play in development of civilization. The phenomenon of ‘the city’ is worldwide. However, they vary in demographic characteristics, and exhibit a diversity of racial, cultural, occupational, religious, educational and other divisions (Lee 1955). All the more what is common is that, the social complexity of the city has brought about a different way of life, characterized by the term urbanism.

There is no one standard definition of a city. Sociologists have offered a variety of definitions to encapsulate the salient features of city life. In the first chapter of *The City* Weber explains how cities developed from market centers which had gained political independence from earlier patriarchal and patrimonial regimes (1958: 66-67). For Simmel ‘the city is where modernity is concentrated or intensified’ (quoted in Doshi 2003: 27). Perhaps the best-known sociological definition of urban area is that of size, density and heterogeneity from Louis Wirth’s essay on *Urbanism as a Way of Life*. Considering sociologically, the city as a special mode of existence or a way of life, he defines a city as “a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals” (Wirth 1938). Although, these are three major characteristics identified to define a city, there are other characteristics, viz. a complex division of labour, high level of technology, high mobility, impersonality of social relations, etc. to define a distinct form of community in cities and its way of life called urbanism (Hatt and Reiss 1957; Ahuja 1997). No single characteristic is enough to make a place city.
The cities have become important locations in the world creating their own distinct way of life through socio-economic, political and cultural transformation. Lewis Mumford describes the culture of city in the following words:

The city is a related collection of primary groups and purposive associations: the first, like family and neighbourhood, are common to all communities, while the second are especially characteristic of city life. These varied groups support themselves through economic organizations that are likewise of a more or less corporate, or at least publicly regulated, character; and they are all housed in permanent structures, within a relatively limited area. The essential physical means of a city’s existence are the fixed site, the durable shelter, the permanent facilities for assembly, interchange, and storage; the essential social means are the social division of labour, which serves not merely the economic life but the cultural processes (Mumford 1938: 480).

There are, however, different perceptions and attitudes about cities, and different cultures have given diverse meanings to cities.

Universally, the city in history emerged with two primary characteristics: first, a high density of population concentrated within a limited space and, second, a predominantly non-agricultural, particularly non-cultivating, population. However, each local culture has imputed distinct meaning to this universal characteristic. For example, there is a tendency in several cultures - and periods in history within cultures - to conceive the city as a den of evil, corrupting the pristine spirit of man, weaning him away from a simple, godly life close to nature, into snares of temptation. The city is also seen as a parasitic growth on the rural countryside, siphoning away its surplus, draining its manpower, without recompense for the village. This perspective is evident in the Gandhian ideology, which strikes a sympathetic chord in the Indian mind and continues to colour our worldview, current economic reforms notwithstanding. Other cultures, on the other hand, hold equally misleading views, glamorising the city and placing it in sharp contrast to the ‘primitivism’ characteristic of villages. The medieval city in Europe is an example of this point of view, and it evolved inevitably, in those cultures, into the industrial and post-industrial cities which have come to symbolise their civilization: urban, capitalistic and technology-dependent (Menon 1999).

The speedy urbanization and emergence of cities have made the transition of traditional societies into modern easy and rurality into urbanism much faster. In India, as elsewhere, cities are becoming common destinations, not only as locations of economic progress and development but also centre of opportunities that would change social, political and cultural destinies of the poor and the marginalized. Bose suggests that, “the process of urbanization is not only desirable but essential for generating economic growth and social change in India” (Bose 1980:4).
The "deprived" people move to cities with aspirations of equal opportunities, of desire to integrate into larger society, of overcoming social disabilities, of living a life of dignity, etc (Alam 2004). The migration to urban areas is often portrayed as a vehicle for wider processes of rapid social change, where 'social mobility, economic change, and political modernization lead to the creation not only of new relations, but also of new values, new attitudes, and new aspirations' (Beteille 1965: 222). Therefore, every migrant that enters the city comes in search of livelihood option as well as seeking aspirations of modern life.

Urban Marginals and the Social Change

'It is difficult to think of an area of society that is untouched by the process of social change' (Zaktman 1973). Social change is an interrelated process and takes place at various levels of social system. It encompasses macro as well as micro level, individual as well as structures, and material as well as the non-material aspects of social reality.

One cannot deny the fact that significant changes have taken place in India since independence through the processes of westernization, industrialization and urbanization (see Srinivas 1966; Singh 1996). Increasing urbanization is one of the major social changes that India has witnessed during the post-independence period. It is also well documented that in India urbanization does provide an anonymous venue for a process of social change far beyond economic needs. The modernity created by urban form of life has attracted rural population to be part of city life.

The special report on migration published by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), after 55th round (July 1999 – June 2000) of inquiry, states that about 27 per cent of the Indian population are migrants.1 The proportion of migrants to the total population was higher (33 per cent) in urban areas than that of (24 per cent) in the rural areas.

Various studies conducted on migration and social change do indicate that migration to urban areas have provided ample opportunities for socio-economic change

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1 Data on migration was first collected by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in its 9th Round (May-Sep 1955) as part of its enquiries on employment and unemployment. Then it has been followed by 11th, 12th, 13th, 18th, 28th, 38th, 43rd, 49th and 55th round with more detailed and comprehensive information on migration in India.
and development among groups and communities for whom the same were not available in rural societies (Engelshoven 2002). The rapid urbanization and migration to the cities after independence has proved that people migrated to urban areas due to various reasons of which the search for employment opportunities has been the most important one (Davis 1962; Aziz: 1984).

The urban life has made it possible for a large number of its inhabitants to go through the processes of Sanskritisation for enhanced status (Srinivas 1966), acquisition of wealth and consumption, educational achievements, socio-religious reformism and new social networks (Osella and Gardner 2004). Urbanization has brought about a considerable degree of occupational mobility and change (Sharda 1991: 262). The exposure to new places, ideas and practices has led to the questioning of existing forms of hierarchy or a reinvention of the self's place within the social order. Today, scholars acknowledge that urbanization is a way out that could help in breaking many of the traditional caste barriers.

Miranda Engelshoven (2002: 294) describes the process of social mobility of migrant caste community, the Saurashtra Patels (Patidars), in the city of Surat in Gujarat. All over the country one can find upwardly mobile peasant caste communities, like the Kurmis, Koeris and Yadavs of Bihar, the Jats of Harayana and Punjab, the Okkaligas and Lingayats of Karnataka, the Reddys of Andhra Pradesh, and the Vellalas of Tamil Nadu. He observes that although their stories may be different, they have made great socio-economic progress in a relatively short time in urban areas, while holding onto or redefining their caste and regional identities in the process. For some, the democratic set-up and the capitalist mode of economy have helped to reduce the economic inequality and in the bargain raise their voice against the ritual (social) inequality. Similarly, a number of empirical studies in northern parts of India have shown that Scheduled Caste groups have witnessed change in their status due to reform movements, process of Sanskritisation and the process of urbanization and westernization (Pundir 1997).

A city, nevertheless, is not as glamorous as often portrayed or perceived and urbanization has not brought equality as expected. Inequalities prevail in the cities, exhibited in their share of marginals that each city continues to hold. “Men come together in cities in order to live,” said Aristotle, “they remain together in order to live the good
life." Only fragments of this purpose are fulfilled in the modern world (Mumford 1938: 492). Breeze introduced the term 'Subsistence Urbanization' which connotes 'an urbanization in which the ordinary citizen has only the bare necessities and sometimes not even those for survival in the urban environment' (Breeze 1966:5). A related concern frequently voiced is that in many developing countries the major cities are already too big and are inefficient and unmanageable (Bhattacharya 2002).

Undoubtedly, a vast majority of people in urban areas of the developing countries live on a level of subsistence urbanization. Similarly, the development of a capitalist economy has brought sharper disparities between those at the top and those at the bottom of social hierarchies in modern societies (Bradley 1996: 11). The ones located at the bottom of the hierarchy are increasingly marginalized and excluded from the prosperous life style enjoyed by the elite groups in urban areas.

One of the major drawbacks of the form of urbanization in India is that it has contributed to enlargement of social contradictions. It led to massive migration of rural poor to cities without their integration in the urban-industrial economy (Jain: 2002). The volume of urban poor living in slums of the cities has increased tremendously. The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) conducted a survey on slums during January to June 1993. The total number of urban slums at that time was estimated to be about 56 thousand. About 6 million households lived in those slums. In India, Census 2001 found that the towns reporting having slums had an average of 22 per cent of the inhabitants living in slums.

The NSSO in its report 2002 of a nation-wide survey on the condition of urban slums estimated that about 52 thousand slums were located in the urban areas of the country and about 8 million urban households lived in these slums. This represented as high as 14 per cent of the total urban households in the country. This indicates that there is an increase in the population living in the margins of urban society.

The positive role of urbanization has often been over-shadowed by the deterioration in the physical environment and quality of life in the urban areas caused by widening gap between demand and supply of essential services and infrastructure. It is estimated that about one third of the urban dwellers live below poverty line. About 15 percent of the
urbanites do not have access to safe drinking water and about 50 percent are not covered by sanitary facilities (http://urbanindia.nic.in/scene.htm).

Similarly, several urban studies have focused on the social background of the migrants in the city, inquiring on the question 'who were the migrants coming to the city'. Much of the Indian historiography, and indeed colonial reports stress that it was the poorest who were "pushed" from the rural areas (see De Hann 1997). However, migration is not caused by poverty only. All strata of rural society migrated. On the basis of his fieldwork De Haan concludes that migration is the result of choices of the migrants, of conscious strategies. But these choices are not driven only by economic factors; social and cultural factors play an equal role (De Haan 1997). Although the search for opportunities to earn livelihood has remained one of the pull factors in migration to the cities, a large majority in order to escape the increasing alienation, exploitation and caste oppression in rural areas have been pushed out to urban areas (Singh 1991).

**Caste and the city**

The information about the over-representation of the higher castes and the under-representation of the lower castes, especially the Scheduled Castes in urban areas has been well documented by the National Sample Survey's 14th round of inquiry (D'Souza 1987: 151). However, the representation of the lower castes, especially the Scheduled Caste has increased manifold over last few decades. According to the Census reports, the Scheduled Caste urban population rose to 16 per cent in 1981 as against 12 per cent in 1971 and 10 per cent in 1961. According to Census 2001, of the total Scheduled Caste population, 20 per cent lived in urban India, which accounts for nearly 12 per cent of the total urban population of India.

This has been brought to focus by a number of studies on urban slum life all of which have a consistent finding that the urban poor not only belong to the lowest rungs of the occupation ladder but also the lowest rung of the caste ladder (D'Souza 1987). In all the major urban cities, the percentage of Scheduled Castes living in slums is significantly higher than in the city as a whole (see Dhadave 1989; Anandhi 1995).
It was generally understood that urbanization and other processes of modernization would penetrate through traditional social institutions to bring about social transformation in Indian society. Caste-system, one such institution, which did not remain untouched, persisted in modern India with its new *avatars*. Beteille argues that ‘the retreat of purity and pollution did not bring caste to an end, for it found new ways of operating in the secular domain’ (Beteille 2002: 6). The caste system did not dissolve with the establishment of modern industry as Marx predicted (Marx 1853) and caste neither disappeared nor remained dormant in socio-political milieu of democratic India. Srinivas argued that the new legal, political and economic forces not only failed to destroy caste, instead opened up new fields for its operation (Srinivas 1962).

With the growth of urbanization, where an estimated 27 percent of the population now live in the cities, both the ideology and organization of the traditional caste system have seen some changes. Nonetheless, caste exhibits its adaptability under the transformed conditions of urban life in India. It has been claimed that traditional Indian social institutions such as the caste and joint family have not disappeared under the modernizing influences of urban life, but adapted themselves to changing conditions (Kosambi 1994). The blatant display of untouchability is not manifested in urban areas but is practiced with sophisticated concealment in a variety of ingenious ways (Krishnan 2002: 279).

Caste, in spite of all opposition in different times, has remained as a system of operation in everyday interactions of different social groups. Apart from social and economic reasons (see Habib 2000) there are clearly visible connections between caste and power. The dominant groups in every historical period, whether *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas*, the power elites of pre-medieval era, or the Indo-Muslim rulers in medieval period or British powers during colonial rule, kept the caste discourse going on in one form or the other for their vested interests. ‘Rulers changed, but the caste structuring of society continued to find recognition irrespective of such changes’ (Chatterjee 2004).

Nicholas Dirks in fact argues that ‘caste as we know it now, is a relatively modern phenomenon – the product of the encounter between India and British colonial rule. This is not to suggest that the British invented caste, but to show that it was on account of British domination that “caste” became a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above
all “systematizing” India’s diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization. Colonialism, made caste the central symbol of Indian society’ (Dirks 2002:5). In modern democratic India the emergence of caste as a significant factor in our socio-political life needs to be seen in the historical perspective.

Patwardhan (1973: 203) has shown in her case study of the “Harijans”\(^2\) of Maharashtra that urbanization leads to greater occupational mobility for the Scheduled Castes. Whenever a group of people continues with their traditional occupation in an urban area, it does so because it finds it financially more rewarding. There is a relative absence of ritual compulsions to do the hereditary work in cities. However, she has observed that not all castes performing menial jobs discard their traditional occupations in cities.

A number of studies testify to the perpetuation of the low socio-economic status of Scheduled Caste communities in urban areas (Kosambi 1994). This has been shown, for example, for the Scheduled Caste population in Andhra Pradesh (Kumar and Venkateshwarlu 1980), Punjab (Gill 1987), and Uttar Pradesh (Sinha 1984). In the urban areas there is ample evidence to show that the Scheduled Caste workers are heavily concentrated in low paid jobs in informal sector (D’Souza 1990). Banerjee and Knight’s (1985) study of the Delhi urban job market during 1975-76 revealed that ex-untouchables are disproportionately represented in poorly paid dead-end jobs. Thus, those at the bottom of the social order in the village remained virtually in the same position in the city (Ramachandran 1989).

A number of studies have also observed that the rural-urban migration has generated a ‘parallel’ society in urban areas of which the caste structure remains an integral part. Gooptu in her study of the ex-untouchable community in the towns of Uttar Pradesh asserts that the experience of segregation and exclusion of the ex-untouchables in rural life were not reversed in the urban context. They were absorbed almost entirely in poorly paid, menial, and low status service jobs. Caste divisions prevalent in the rural situation were replicated in urban areas, notwithstanding the relaxation of direct caste domination in employment relations (Gooptu 1996). Gooptu also reports that although urbanization had a

\(^2\) As mentioned earlier the term “Harijan” is not a caste name. It is a common nomenclature used for the population of the ex-untouchable caste groups (see more details in chapter VI).
liberating influence on the caste-subordination of ex-untouchables in occupation relations, the benefits of so-called ‘modernization’ for the ex-untouchables were limited. The caste distinctions were not eradicated in the crucial area of employment opportunities. (Gooptu 1999: 297).

In spite of the continuous increase in the number of urban poor and the reality of ‘subsistence urbanization’ the importance of urbanization is not diminished. This, in fact, raises important questions on its very philosophy and foundations. Where a great part of its inhabitants can only just eke out a living under poor physical and economic conditions, can the city be held as the centre for civilization and progress? And, can city life wipe out differences caused by gender, caste, race or culture, where a large majority of its population is marginalized and excluded based on differences and inherent inequalities? (Thorbek 1994:11).

A large number of poor and the ex-untouchables have remained excluded from liberating modern processes and continue to experience deprivations. Nevertheless, it provided environment to the marginalized, conducive for the construction of cultural and social identities – a sense of belonging which draws people together not only into an ‘imagined community’ but also at times ‘solidarity extending communities’.

Identity Politics in Contemporary India

Identity has become one of the core issues in contemporary urban context. Gooptu suggests through her study of the ex-untouchables how migration and urbanization influenced, in significant ways, the pivotal concern and ideological focus of untouchable caste movements in the early 20th century (Gooptu 1996). In India new avenues have opened up for “caste identities” and as observed by M.N. Srinivas (1996), the systemic changes occurred in caste fostered by urbanization and westernization did see new patterns of social relations. Similarly, the exposure to urbanization has given caste identities a fresh lease of life where they can express themselves fearlessly and with greater assertion than in rural areas (Gupta 2004). The transition towards urbanization provides possibilities for a new ways of understanding oneself, ones community and the other.
Bradley says, “Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. It gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your social relationships, your complex involvement with others” (Bradley 1996: 24). Based on this definition Bradley makes a distinction between ‘personal identity’ and ‘social identity’.

Personal identity refers to the construction of the self: our sense of ourselves as unique individuals, how we perceive ourselves and how we think others see us. Social identity is also a complex issue, which refers to the way that we as individuals locate ourselves within the society in which we live and the way in which we perceive others as locating us. The concept of ‘identity’ is related to a process of self-understanding and to a process in which the ‘other’ understands and defines me (Franco 2002). The understanding of the ‘other’ becomes important more so, because identities have to be validated or negated by those with whom one relates (Jenkins 1996).

Bradley further identifies three levels of social identity: passive, active and politicized.

1. ‘Passive identities’ are potential identities in the sense that they are derived from the sets of lived relationships (class, caste, gender, ethnicity, region, religion etc.) in which the individuals are engaged, but they are not acted on. Individuals are not particularly conscious of passive identities and do not normally define themselves by ‘them’ unless events occur which bring those particular relationships to the fore.

2. ‘Active identities’ are those, which individuals are conscious of and which provide a base for their actions. They are positive elements in an individual’s self-identification. Active identification often occurs as a defence against the action of others or when an individual is conscious of being defined in a negative way (exclusion). Active identities are promoted by the experience of discrimination (assertion).

3. Where identities provide a more constant base for action and where individuals constantly think of themselves in terms of an identity, it is described as a ‘politicized identity’. Politicized identities are formed through political action and
provide the base for collective organization of either a defensive or an affirmative nature (identity politics) (Bradley 1996: 25-26).

Identities are never static, but keep changing. As Jenkins says, ‘it is never a final settled matter’ (Jenkins 1996). The time and space are two important parameters within which an identity is formed, developed, maintained, or changed. Over a period, identities (of the self as well as of community) are defined and redefined, formed and reformed, both by internal as well as external forces. The construction of identity is a political process. For this purpose identity politics becomes important.³

Identity politics calls for a continuous understanding and engagement with “the other” or that person or group of persons against which the politicized identity is differentiated. Considering that people have multiple identities, commonalities can still be identified within differences upon which to build solidarity. Identity politics also emphasizes the need for sharper analysis of power relations in order to locate ‘the enemy’ more precisely. This depends upon the perception by the excluded of their situations and the existence of organizational capability and leadership (Rao 1984).

It is not that easy in all cases to change ones identity when socio-cultural and political dimensions are involved in defining ones identity. In some cases, one lives with an identity, although painful, say in case of degrading caste identity (Franco 2002). At other times the same person can assert a different identity. This process of assertion is connected to the dynamic and challenging aspects of an identity formation.

Identity formation cannot be dynamic with the content of the past (what has been, what has been given, traditions, roots, etc.) neither just with the content of the present (what we are, what we have, our present context, etc). For it to be a dynamic, it cannot do without the content of the future. Social transformation or social emancipation is the content of the future - where we want to go? What we want to be? Who we want to become? In the bargain, social change is possible only when a community perceives and builds its identity on the content of the future, however difficult and challenging it might be.

³ ‘Identity politics’ refers to a circumstance when one or some identities of a person are prioritized over his/her other identities and the prioritized identity becomes the basis for mobilization or making demands (Real 2002).
In this sense, when a person migrates to the city, economic needs may be dominant but distancing from caste exploitation remains his or her continuous engagement. The processes of inclusion and exclusion in the wider urban society bring greater awareness of ones socio-economic position and status. Simultaneously it gives rise to a sense of urgency for internal awakening and reform on the one hand, and on the other hand, a need 'to resort to collective action to protest their exclusion and strive for their inclusion in the various spheres of opportunities' (Gore 1993). In the process, new identities get forged and existing orders challenged or in some way changed. Today, a number of ex-untouchable caste groups, e.g. the Mahars of Maharashtra, the Vankars of Gujarat, the Valmikis of Harayana, etc are passing through this process in urban India.

"Modernity and development have, thus, radically altered the ways in which individuals and groups understand their environment and their place in a stratified social order. At the heart of the process of social change and development is, therefore, the quest for new identities and the search for new ways to conceptualise the nature of change" (Gooptu 1996: 222). Thus, the process of identity formation is a movement towards restoring dignity and equality. The process of redefining oneself and asserting ones identity is envisaged as a step forward towards the larger project of social transformation.

Caste identities in contemporary India

A number of social scientists argue that there is ample evidence today that caste system as hierarchy is disintegrating (Beteille 2002; Sheth 2002) but the reality of caste, as an influencing social institution has not disappeared. What is being observed is that from Brahmins to ex-untouchables each social group is asserting its group identity as belonging to a social caste group. Often it is adopted as a strategy to claim what they are deprived of as citizens. Thus, rights and identity have acquired a strong connection (Alam 2004). With each caste group asserting itself as an entity, caste has become a significant fact in contemporary India. It has become a 'dynamic force' in the context of politics of caste and identity.

Caste identities do not carry negative connotations as in the past. On the contrary democratic processes, economic development, and urbanization have encouraged various caste identities to assert themselves in order to claim for their rights to citizenship in plural
and democratic society. After the Report of the Mandal Commission, for instance, caste as a basis of collective struggle for gaining equality in positions and social status became a term of respectable usage among the oppressed. It was now seen as an empowering process – a way to increase one’s meager entitlements in society (ibid 2004). Hence, in this context it is important to understand the emergence of Dalit as a socio-political category providing an identity to the marginalized caste groups in traditional social hierarchy.

The emergence of “Dalit” as socio-political category is an outcome of caste assertion from below. The term Dalit, first used by Jotiba Phule, and also used by B.R. Ambedkar in his Marathi speeches became popular in the early 1970s with the emergence of Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra (Omvedt 1995). Dalit is a modern category consisting of various caste groups of the ex-untouchables. It is not a monolithic bloc. They are divided into different castes and there are historical differences among them. Although questions have been raised about the differentiations among Dalit category (Shah A.M. 2002), these differences are indications of historical development of a category and levels of politicization of various castes within the category. Dalit is not a caste; it is a socio-political category expressing a constructed identity with which the subaltern communities that have been discriminated against for centuries identify themselves (Reddy Sunita 2002). As Zelliot (2001a) would say “Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution”.

The emergence of Dalit category rests on two basic fundamentals. One, to give voice to the experience of being Dalit – crushed and exploited, in their own terms and from their own point of view. And two, to shape that experience in a social institution of solidarity expressed in a new identity called ‘Dalit’. Over the last three decades the ‘Dalit’ category has brought a new set of agenda from below to the discourse on caste system in India. This possibility of coming together on a single platform under one identity has strengthened the collective power of Dalit communities.

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The term ‘Dalit’ is and has been defined exclusively and inclusively. There are some Dalits and non-Dalits, who under exclusive definition refer only to the Scheduled Castes or erstwhile untouchables. There is another group of Dalits and non-Dalits who includes Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under the category Dalits. This definition at times in extension also includes all the exploited masses within the fold of Dalit’ (Louis 2003a: 31). The term used in this study is in its exclusive sense, confining to ex-untouchables. Similarly, the study uses the term “ex-untouchables” referring to the definition of Dalit in its exclusive sense that they are no more ‘untouchables’.
In recent past there has been a strong self-assertion for an identity and self-wroth among Dalit groups. Dalits have begun to question the present socio-economic structures that have been discriminative and exploitative (Shah 2001:224). Their quest has not been expressed merely socially and politically but through modes of powerful self-expression such as Dalit literature (Yagnik 2002:36).

With the coming of modernity and development it was expected that the secular would triumph over the sacred; it was predicted that primordial ideas and identities of caste, region and religion would dissolve with the onward march of progress and development. “Yet defying all theoretical postulations, these identities have come to form some of the major loci of politics in the modern world” (Gooptu 1996: 221). In the course of rapid urban transformation, the poor and the marginalized have invested caste and religion with new meaning and significance for their social and political action. Gupta encapsulates this reality while he says, “Caste has not changed, but the potentialities that were always there within this stratificatory system are now out in the open and in full view” (Gupta 2004: xix). Caste remains a significant factor shaping social identities and relations, affecting life-chances of various sections in democratic India in many ways.

MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN URBAN INDIA

Ever since independence, the processes of urbanization and later on economic liberalization have accelerated the pace of socio-political and economic transition in India. Sociological studies on urban community have not received the same attention as rural India from sociologists. Kosambi, while providing an overview of urbanization and urban development in India, mentions that social institution like caste and joint family in urban setting have not been given sufficient attention by mainstream sociology. She notes that ‘we do not find a set of definitive theoretical statements about the urban impact on these traditional institutions (beyond an indication of their continuities) or about the important relationship between caste and the class system in urban areas’ (Kosambi 1994: 99).

Over last few decades a large population of marginalized communities has migrated to urban areas. Their aspirations for economic progress and quest for life of dignity have met with mixed responses. Although, caste has remained central to
researchers, marginalized caste groups and the processes of their marginalization as well as assertion for empowerment in the changing urban context have not been sufficiently represented in sociological studies.

However, a few studies of this nature have provided revealing insights (Lynch 1969; Patwardhan 1973; Gould 1988; Ranga Roa 1989; Kamble 2002). Similarly, there are only a few researches on specific ex-untouchable caste groups who have highlighted different perspectives ‘from below’ (e.g. on Chamars: Cohn 1969; Lynch 1969; Khare 1984; on Bhangi sweepers: Kolenda 1964; Chatterjee 1981; Shyamlal 1992; on Dom: Kaushik 1976; on Pallayar: Mencher 1972; on Pallan: Gough 1955; on Parayan: Moffatt 1979; Deliege 1997).

This study is focused on the scavengers of the Bhangi caste5, in Ahmedabad. The “Bhangis”, traditional caste of scavengers in Gujarat,6 is one such historically marginalized Dalit community. The community is placed at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and is considered the lowest even among the Dalits. The Bhangis have migrated in large numbers from rural areas to urban centers in search of livelihood opportunities. A large section of the community still continues the occupation of scavenging in towns and cities. The city of Ahmedabad has the largest population of the Bhangis in Gujarat, hailing from different parts of the rural areas of the state.

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5 Various authors have used the terms like scavenger, Bhangi, Valmiki (Balmiki) designating similar meaning (those engaged with the occupation of scavenging). However, the problem of usage of these terms in this study is explained at the end of this chapter.

6 According to Enthoven (1975) in Gujarat, Bhangis are known by terms like Halalkhors, Olgana, Barvashias, Metariya, Jamphoda and Mela. In some areas of Gujarat they are also known by various other names such as Valmiki, Rakhesar and Rukhi. It is believed that they are called ‘Rakhesar’ (protectors) because, when invaders attacked the village, the Bhangis were sent with ‘dhols’ (drums) by the villagers, and made to march backwards, facing the invaders. They are also known as ‘Rukhis’ because they are believed to be the descendants of Sarbhang rishi. Moreover, as they were guarding the entrance of the village, as well as the entry of the threshing area, they were known as ‘Jhampdas’ (Franco 2004).

In different parts of the country the Bhangis are known by different names like Jamadar, Domra, Patharphar, Barvashias, Metariya, Jamphoda, Rakhesar, etc (for more see Fuchs 1981; Sarkar: 1984; Chaudhary 2000). In North East (Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya) they are known by the name Jamadar or Bhangi (mostly from Bihar and Punjabi immigrants to municipality and military cantonment) and as Kabui Nagas (local Tribals who are engaged in the occupation of scavenging). In Rajasthan they are called Dumar or Domra, Mehtar in Bihar, Bhumalia in West Bengal, Heddish in Orissa, Madiga in Andhra Pradesh and Thoti in Tamil Nadu. The most common name for them in North India is Mehtar, which literary means "prince" or leader (Chaudhary 1988). Traditionally, the scavengers’ castes in Punjab were known as Chuhras who are now known as Mazhabis.
The Scavengers in Urban India

Scavenging has been in existence in Indian society from the ancient times. However, there is no authentic history about origin and functions of scavengers. Different scholars have attempted to explain the possible origin of Bhangis who were largely engaged in scavenging occupations through mythological, historical, ethnological, and anthropological, tenets (Shyamlal 1992; Chaudhary 2000). Several old treatises specifically say that scavenging is the duty of the lower castes, now constitutionally known as Scheduled Castes.7

It is said that initially the work was not hereditary, but after the lapse of several years it gradually developed into a hereditary system. Only the ‘inferior’ people, often the war captives were forced to work as scavengers. ‘It is generally agreed that their present position in the caste hierarchy is a result of a defeat in ancient times; the captured soldiers were given the work of slaves or were made to do inferior jobs as punishment. Imprisoned in a separate residence under supervision, they were separated from the other communities and were called ‘Untouchables’ (Franco et al 2004).

There are a number of references where scholars (see Nagar 1990:9; Malkani 1961:27) are of the view that the Bhangis were at one time Kshatriyas. However, over the years they are ‘converted’ into Bhangis. Shyamlal calls this process “Bhangiisation” – ‘according to which a high-caste person accepts the membership of the Bhangi (Untouchable) castes and thereby lowers his social as well as ritual position in the Hindu social order’ (Shyamlal 1999a: 214; 1992a).

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7 William Crooke of Bengal Civil Service tells us that the “rise of the present Bhangi caste seems from the names applied to the castes and its subdivisions, to date from the early period of Mohammedan rule”. Old Hindu literature mentions no Bhangis of present function. In traditional Hindu rural society, he was a corn-measurer, a village policeman, a custodian of village boundaries. But scavenging came along with the Muslim and British rule. Their numbers also multiplied. According to 1901 Census, the Bhangis were most numerous in the Punjab and the United Provinces, which were the heartland of Muslim domination (Sawrup 1996).

Ambedkar propounded a theory that the present-day Untouchables are the descendants of erstwhile Buddhists who refused to accept Brahminic religion and continued to follow the teachings of Lord Buddha. For instance the Chuhras of the Punjab (scavengers and sweepers) were proud of their religion and had a patron saint known as Lal Beg. According to Youngsson (Encyclopedia of Ethics and Religion), Lal Beg was perhaps a Bhikkhu, monk in red robe. To this day, the priests in this caste stitch robes out of cloth collected from garbage-bins. Their prayers called the Kursihamas, have no mention of Rama, Krishna, Vishnu and they followed their own customs and rituals for solemnizing marriages, burial and other rites of passage (Das 2001).
Vijay Prasad narrates the perceptions of his respondents who relate the emergence of scavengers in Indian society to the Muslim rule. It is said, “there were no scavengers before. They came into existence when the Muslims entered this land. As Muslim women observed seclusion, the Muslims needed sweepers. Therefore, they made others into sweepers. Many of them were Brahmins originally. Some were Rajputs, and there were men of other castes. It is obvious that the Muslims forced them to become sweepers and to do such menial work” (Prasad 2000:78; see also Pathak 1991:38). 8

Since this group had been engaged in the manual disposal of human excreta, they were looked down upon as a profane group, the contact with whose members was regarded defiling. This led to their spatial segregation, requiring them to live in separate clusters outside towns and villages. The traditional social order assigned them the lowest social position due to their unclean occupation (Paswan and Pramanshi 2002).

The Bhangi was described by Manu as descended from the Chandala, said to be the offspring of the union of a Shudra male and a Brahmin woman (Singh 1998). The word Bhangi is derived from ‘bhanga’ or broken, implying a community whose character is broken or destroyed. The Bhangis, according to Chauhan (1967), ‘are those who have broken away from society’. It is therefore, ‘derogatory in meaning’. The title ‘Bhangi’ is now generally employed and has, therefore, been taken as the designation of the caste’ (Shyam Lal 1999). Over the years, specific references are made to Bhangis as the sub-caste among the Shudras involved in the scavenging occupation (Paswan and Pramanshi 2002).

In rural India, the actual work of scavenging and of sweeping the lanes was entrusted to a menial servant, who as a rule belonged to the lowest caste and lived on the outskirts of the village. He was also retained by the community for the performance of various kinds of general services. There were a few families in each village taking care of these functions in the villages. There are a number of studies describing various functions carried out by Bhangis in rural areas (Russel and Hiralal 1916; Crooke 1974; Enthoven 1975). Their duties were multifarious. They swept the lanes and removed impurities, kept

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8 During my field work a number of respondents also narrated similar explanation that Muslim kings and rich households established scavengers in urban area (see Chapter VIII). However, some respondents were of the opinion that it is clearly a BJP propaganda to instigate Bhangis against Muslims. It is established by Habib that there were toilets during Indus Civilization and there were scavengers to take care of the same (Habib 2002:43).
the village meeting-house clean, patrolled the village at night, acted as messengers to the headmen, served as referees on matters affecting the village boundaries, guarded the crops, assisted in agricultural operations, attended on Government officials who visited the village, and carry palanquins and torches at festivals (Matthai 1993; Franco et al 2004).

The problem of night soil and its management was perceived seriously in the urban areas as the same was seldom perceived seriously in the villages (Chaudhary 2000; Chaplin 1997). As the urban areas increased and their importance grew, the need for sanitation and its maintenance increased proportionately. There was growing need in the towns for scavengers, sweepers and conservancy workers. This has contributed to rapid out-migration of Bhangis from rural to urban areas to meet these demands for labour. In fact, 'in the colonial period, they were brought into urban areas to perform the works of scavenging and sweeping and became an urban community' (Singh 1998).

Urbanization made the Bhangis even more closely identified with the traditional occupation of scavenging. With the expansion of urbanization after the 960s, the number of scavengers and sweepers has increased in urban areas. The task force constituted by the Planning Commission, in its report submitted in 1991 had estimated the number of scavengers for the year 1989 as 4,00,949 individuals, out of which 3,33,729 were in the urban areas. This shows that about 83 per cent of scavengers are in the urban areas (see also The Ministry of Welfare, Government of India, Annual Report, 1995-96).

As Prashad (2000) has amply demonstrated, 'settling the Balmikis9 in the cities as sanitary workers, and moulding them into accepting this work has been one of the major achievements, first of the colonial administration, and later on, of the state and political parties’ (see also Gooptu 1996). Although they are employed in organized as well as in informal sector; the state is the largest agency that employs and pays over a million scavengers as its apparatus (Macwan 2001a). In urban areas all the functions related to sanitation and its maintenance are carried out by this particular caste group and unlike in the villages they act in the cities mostly as the sanitary workers. The other traditional duties they performed in the villages are no more relevant in the cities and towns.

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9 The terms “Balmiki” (Hindi) refers to the caste of the scavengers in Northern India.
Another important change marked in the pattern of their employment in the towns and cities was that to a large extent, they ceased to be servile labourers and servants of the higher castes and worked instead as paid municipal employees (see Gooptu 1996). They have, therefore, become sweepers and scavengers and a niche for them has been created in the urban areas as official ‘Safai-kamdaras’.\(^\text{10}\) They have become indispensable in all public places, institutions, factories, hospitals, cinema houses, business establishments and NGO offices, anywhere where there are cleaning jobs to be done (Franco et al 2004). Thus, with urbanization those engaged in the occupation of scavenging and sanitary works are bestowed with more secular (neutral) and official status, the Safai-karmacharis.

The term Safai-karmachari is used now throughout the government records and has gained official, legitimate use. It is defined as ‘a person engaged in or employed for manually carrying human excreta or any sanitation work’ (National Commission for Safai-karmachari Act 1993). In some quarters, a distinction is made between scavengers and sweepers. Sweeping is considered as more hygienic and non-polluting sanitation work, whereas scavenging is polluting, unclean and degrading. However, the definition provided by the National Commission for Safai-karmachari includes both, under the term “scavenger” - those dealing with human excreta in particular and sanitation work in general.

The nomenclature ‘Safai-karmachari’ commonly used in urban areas refers to those who work as sanitation workers for the state,\(^\text{11}\) which includes, scavenging, sweeping and those engaged in manhole cleaning. Some social scientists prefer nomenclature Safai-kamdar / Safai-karmachari to the term scavenger because it is a neutral term where as scavenger is value-loaded and often abusively used term (Vivek 1998).

The above details point to an observation that the Bhangis were engaged in various types of occupations and functions most of which were not unclean. Accordingly they have been bestowed with different names. Over the years, they have been associated closely

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\(^\text{10}\) Safai-kamdar is a Gujarati word for those engaged in sanitation work in organised sector and is interchangeable with the Hindi word Safai-karmachari.

\(^\text{11}\) The term ‘state’ includes all those institutions that have public character (government departments, municipal corporations, and educational institutions receiving grants from the state governments like school, colleges, and hospitals) (see Franco et al 2004).
with the occupation of scavenging and sweeping. Today, for all practical purposes Bhangi is considered the caste of the scavengers. There is another important shift where the captives who worked as servants of the village are now employed by the state for a specific type of labour in urban labour market and designated with an official title of Safai-karmacharis. Some social scientists working on urban sweepers and scavengers referred them as ‘professionals of the city’ (Vivek 1998; 2000). Or in recent times they have been called “Swasthya Kamdar” (the health workers) e.g. in Delhi Municipal Corporations.

This confirms the theory that construction of names and designation is a conscious attempt by the user to pursue the agenda in maintaining the politics of social hierarchy. The names become active representations of the life world for which they are designated in the politics of space (see Guru 2001). History plays an important role in understanding the development of social categories and their reconstruction in changing times.

Sociological studies on scavengers

Scavenging is a pan Indian phenomenon and there are scavengers in every society. The Bhangis as a caste group is closely associated with the occupation of scavenging. However, there has not been much sociological research on Bhangi caste (Shyam Lal 1992). References to Bhangis are generally found in anthropological village studies and administrative documents describing their lowest status in social hierarchy, their functions and duties, the practice of untouchability, the various names by which they are known in different regions, etc (Crook 1896; Russel 1916; Wiser and Wiser 1958 [1963]; Ansari 1960; Issacs 1965; Saberwal 1976; Risley 1981; Matthai 1993). Clean People and Unclean Country (Malkani 1969) is perhaps the only book devoted exclusively to the Bhangi caste giving a connected account of the Bhangis residing almost throughout the country.

Studies have been conducted on scavengers focusing on one or more sociological dimensions like, occupational mobility, change, geographical and spatial characteristics, women, etc. There are a number of such region specific studies now providing sociological insights into their life, i.e. Bhangis in the slums of Mysore (Venketarayappa 1972), Balmiki women in Delhi (Karlekar 1976; 1982), Banaras Sweepers (Chatterjee 1981), Female scavengers of Patna (Chaudhary 1988), Bhangis of Maharashtra (Thakar and Khadas 1989), Scavengers in Himachal (Thakar, Sharma and Kaur 1989), Bhangis of Jodhpur city

Although there are only a few sociological inquiries investigating the life of scavengers in urban India, they provide some important insights into their socio-cultural and political life. Shyam Lal (1992) in a study confined to the city of Jodhpur, investigates all important aspects of life and culture of the respondents drawn from educationally advanced families as also from social and political workers. Venkatarayappa (1972) provides a comprehensive account of the socio-economic conditions of the sweepers from two slums in Mysore city. This account gives deep insights into their environmental relations and economic and social conditions and brings to light their deplorable conditions.

Chatterjee (1981) focuses her study on the urban community of sweepers of Benaras. It investigates into how sweepers organize their lives and what it is that holds them together as a group distinct from the larger society and methods they use to try and improve the conditions in which they live and work. The study also probes the relationship between men and women and the varying forms that these take in different areas of their social organization. The findings indicate that the pattern of sweepers’ life is not changing greatly though the style of behaviour is in some way moving closer to that of the larger society. Social mobility is low and there is rigid segregation of the group from other castes and classes. The study also shows that in spite of attempts by government to raise sweepers from their traditional subservience, occupational mobility is minimal. The study investigates the role and status of women in the community. Though the women are articulate and free in some domains, they do not experience same freedom as men do in all aspects.

Another study conducted by Karlekar (1982) views the impact of rapid urbanization and mixed economy on the sweeper women in Delhi. The empirical evidence in the study shows that ‘men are the chief beneficiaries of the modern economy’. However,
contrary to established notions, there is no imminent threat of unemployment for the women, especially those employed in caste-based occupation like sweeping. The author suggests that, 'in fact modernization is helped by the continuation of women in traditional jobs which releases men for the new technology'.

The Bhangi community in the city of Delhi is also the subject of Rama Sharma's study (1995). This study is about the various aspects of socio-cultural and economic marginality of Bhangis, their stigmatized identity and their efforts to escape from their marginal situation by bringing about changes in their status. The awareness of exploitation and deprivation has led to unionization and politicization within the ambit of the democratic processes in India. Some of the findings of the study state that though a large majority of Bhangi men and women are still in the traditional caste occupation, they see occupational mobility for the younger generation.

The Balmiki identity has provided a framework within which members of the Bhangi caste have attained group identity. However, religious symbols have generated in them segregation instead of integration with the rest of the society. Culturally, they have remained beyond the pale of Hindu Sanskritic great tradition, and have existed as part of the preliterate local little tradition. Their social, economic and cultural marginality is reflected in their peripheral settlement pattern. The study also focuses on the role of trade unions, which provides a platform for the Bhangis to bargain their demands.

Based on the secondary data an attempt has been made by B.N. Srivastava (1997) to trace the origin of scavengers in India, their social and economic status, caste organizations, cultural heritage and territorial distribution. One of the important findings of the study is that although a large number of sweepers, mostly from northern India, have abandoned Hindu religion and converted to other religions, no significant change has come about in their occupation or social status.

By using a variety of historical and ethnographic sources Vijay Prashad (2000) details the social history of the Balmikis of Delhi, uncovering the little known world of the sweepers of Delhi. Prashad examines the work patterns, social organizations, and the development of the social and political identity of the Balmikis, tracing their history from the 1860s. The study also deals with the role played by the state in establishing Chuhras as
sanitation workers in the city, who were not sweepers by caste occupation and worked as agricultural labourers before the twentieth century. He further demonstrates how ideologies of nationalism, Hindu militancy and Hindu reformism work towards the incorporation of the Balmikis into the Hindu fold and accelerating the 'hinduising processes'. In this context, two booklets, Mai Bhangi Hoo (1990) and Balmiki jayanti aur bhangi Jati (1973) by Bhagvan Das, provide insightful contribution in understanding the Balmikis of North India.

Shyam Lal, examining the processes of inter-actions between caste and politics based on documentary sources and personal interviews of caste elites, observes similar changing patterns (Shyam Lal 1999). On the basis of his study, he argues that the socio-political awakening among the Bhangis gave them a new impetus and as such they have become a part and parcel of the mainstream. The growing consciousness about their socio-political rights has generated a new feeling among them. The study has attempted to focus on the changing life ways, through its representative Sabha – the All India Safai Mazdoor Congress (a caste association of the Bhangis of the country).

S.N. Choudhary (2000) addresses some of the vital questions pertaining to the causes and process of occupational mobility among the Bhangis in the city of Bhopal. He observes that, as a result of occupational mobility there is significant change in their physical, social and psychological quality of life. They have new attitudes and perceptions towards life. P.S. Vivek (1998) makes an in-depth inquiry into existing conditions of sweepers and scavengers in the city of Mumbai. While examining the changes taking place among the sweepers and scavengers in the city, he elaborates on six major factors operating among scavengers. These negative factors he calls HEDOSS – Harassment, Exploitation, Domination, Oppression, Subjugation and Suppression. The study does reveal that change is slowly taking over ‘traditional life’ of the scavengers. Some modern factors are closely visible as those inherent in a modern economy, the slow development of a secular outlook, a democratic consciousness, etc.

S.P. Punalekar (1990) provides an overview of the social situation of sweepers and scavengers in rural and urban western India, mainly the state of Maharashtra and Gujarat. He argues that internal awakening and consciousness is basic to the mobilization of a
social group for its socio-economic advancement. He points out that it is only in recent years that some efforts towards mobilization and conscientisation have become visible among scavengers. Similarly, based on a number of interviews, Franco et al (2004) offer an in-depth view of the present and future of the Valmiki community in Gujarat. The study provides insightful narrations on educational opportunities, the work of the Valmikis, and the practice of asking for left over food at night, their religious faith and the question of identity of the community. The study concludes that the Valmikis of Gujarat have a long way to go but there are signs of change.

In a survey of 2000 families of scavengers in the city of Baroda, Manubhai Makwana reveals that there is hardly any change in the conditions of the scavengers in post-independent India. He observes that education among scavengers is very low and deprivation experienced over centuries is internalized and awareness is very low. There is hardly any attempt to liberate these groups (Makwana 1997).

Shinoda (1995) highlighted similar finding in his study based on a household survey on socio-economic conditions of the Bhangi households conducted in eight local bodies of Ahmedabad district. The study finds out that there has not been any visible improvement in the occupational mobility of the Bhangis as a whole over the three generations. However, he concludes that the improvement of the institutional climate and their service and working conditions may surely provide them a material basis for the socio-economic development. He is of the opinion that the Bhangis lack centripetal force as a community, which is necessary for undertaking internal reforms for social development.

The review of literature shows two important trends as far as scavengers of urban India are concerned. A number of studies indicate that there is no substantial or visible change among scavengers in urban areas. They continue with their traditional occupation, conversion to other religions has not changed their social status. Although their economic conditions have shown improvement, deprivation continues, and to a large extent they remain segregated from rest of the society. Some studies do provide evidences that modern factors of urban life are contributing in their internal awakening and democratic consciousness; the change is slowly taking over the traditional life of scavengers in urban
areas. A number of studies indicate that the scavengers have a long way to go. Nevertheless, there are signs of change not only in their socio-economic conditions but also in their attitudes and perceptions about themselves.

The review of literature also shows that most studies have attempted to investigate the life of scavengers as ‘occupational category’ in urban India. However, how modernization processes, and caste - the traditional social institution, influence each other, affecting the process of social change among the scavengers living in urban India has received very little attention in sociological studies on scavengers. This study engages in addressing some of these issues.

THE FIELD AREA OF STUDY

The Region of Gujarat

Economically Gujarat has been one of the fastest growing states in India. The state has experienced tremendous changes in its economic structure both in rural and urban areas since the 1960s. A wave of green revolution, urbanization and commercialization has changed the urban and rural scene especially in those areas endowed with better natural resources and infrastructural facilities. Although the traditional textile industry has almost collapsed, industrially, Gujarat has taken very big strides. It has become the second highest industrialized state in India, after Maharashtra. Gujarat has now rich diversification in industries – engineering, electrical and electronic, petro-chemicals, fertilizers, drugs, dyes-dye stuffs, processes units, diamond cutting, chemicals, etc. Though the state has only 5 per cent of India’s population, it produces 11.5 per cent of the national industrial output. The state has taken a quantum jump in the post liberalization period by attracting the highest share of industrial investment in the country (Hirway and Mahadevia: 1999)12.

One of the major characteristics of modernized Gujarat is its urbanization. Gujarat is the third most urbanized state of the country and is steadily transforming into a predominantly urban society. Total population of the state as per Census 2001 is 50.6 million, which includes the urban population of 18.9 million distributed in 242 urban

centers. The state experienced a rapid industrial growth after independence resulting in an accelerated pace of urban growth.

The population of urban Gujarat has increased by more than five times during the first eight decades of the 20th century. It has increased from 2.03 million in 1901 to 10.60 million in 1981 and 18.93 million in 2001 (see table 1.1). The level of urbanization in Gujarat during the 20th century has always been higher than the country as a whole. Over the years, the share of urban population has gone up to 38 per cent, which is much higher than national average of 27.7 per cent. With these trends continuing, forecasts suggest that by 2021, 35 million people constituting nearly 47 percent of the state population would be residing in urban Gujarat.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Urban Population (Millions)</th>
<th>Share of Urban population (%)</th>
<th>Decadal Growth Rates (%)</th>
<th>Urban Population (Millions)</th>
<th>Share of Urban population (%)</th>
<th>Decadal Growth Rates (%)</th>
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<td>27.78</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India

A large number of urban centers in Gujarat are concentrated in the industrialized corridor from Mehsana in the north to Vapi in the south located along the Ahmedabad-Mumbai railroad link. This “golden corridor” has contributed to the rapid economic growth and economic prosperity of the state. The development of small-scale industries all over the state and large-scale industries in certain areas, generated employment potentials causing rapid rural–urban migration (Shahi 1989: 92). That is one of the reasons for the state of Gujarat to have such a wide urban base. Unlike other states, the problem of over dependency on one city does not exist in Gujarat.

However, the seven “Corporation cities” - Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Jamnagar and Junagadh, accommodate more than half of the state’s urban population, indicating their primacy. Gujarat now has three, million-plus cities - Ahmedabad, Surat, and Vadodara. The largest city, Ahmedabad, which is de-facto state capital, accounts for over 23 per cent of the total urban population. The city is likely to
grow into a mega-city with the inclusion of neighbouring urban areas into its fold (Urban Development Department - Govt_of_Gujarat.htm).

The overall development in the state of Gujarat is characterized by polarization along economic, social and communal lines. For centuries, the image of Gujarat in the outside world has been that of having an entrepreneurial spirit, capitalist mentality and geographical mobility (Shah: 2002). On the one hand, it consists of a dominant entrepreneurial class that tries to match the economic growth of the First World. On the other hand, there is a vast majority of the labouring poor who toil and are subjugated (Shah and Mario: 2002). It is observed that the benefits of economic growth have hardly percolated to the lower strata of society. What does this mean for scavengers and how does it influences their lives is attempted to explore in this study.

The economy is marked by two major characteristics namely, substantial proportion of population, particularly among the Tribals, Dalits, Backward Classes and Muslims, living below poverty-line or just above the margin and increasing economic inequalities with extravagantly affluent class with its highly westernized lifestyles and conspicuous consumption. The rural life in Gujarat has not crossed into real modernity and is still by and large unjust, in-egalitarian, caste-bound, exploitative and oppressive, with increasing number of atrocities against women, Dalits and now Muslims (Patel 2002). In terms of social or human development index, its performance is not enviable. The educational backwardness among the poor and the low castes and the wide variations in terms of quality of education is a major problem. Among all states in India, Gujarat ranks ninth in health and political participation (Mahadevia: 2000).

This uneven development in Gujarat has resulted in large-scale migration by poor households from poorer regions to nearby urban and rural areas in search of livelihood as well as to escape social oppression. The more industrially developed and urbanized centers provide conducive environment for migrant workers to improve their livelihood. Providing a detailed mapping of the inter-regional migration between 1961-81, Visaria and Kothari (1984) clearly show a strong association between the level of development and immigration within the state. Another study by Amita Shah (2002) also indicates the direction
of inter-regional migration, mainly from rural to urban areas. Evidently, the incidence of rural-urban migration was higher in Gujarat than in the rest of India.

The City of Ahmedabad

Historical development of the city

The city of Ahmedabad known commonly as the Manchester of India is located in one of the highly industrialised and urbanized parts of state of Gujarat. It is the seventh largest city in India. After the bifurcation from Bombay state in May 1960, Ahmedabad was made the capital of the newly carved state of Gujarat.

Its origin dates back to the 10th century town of Ashaval. A significant event in the development of the city was the construction of the walled city on the eastern banks of the Sabarmati River in 1411 AD by Ahmed-Shah, the historical founder of the city (see Nayak 2003). Since then, many rulers have been in their seat of power. It was ruled by the dynasty till 1573 before becoming a part of the Moghul Empire (1573 – 1753). During Maratha rule (1753 – 1817) it covered an area today known as the Walled city.

The second phase of its development is associated with the British taking over the administration of Ahmedabad. A Cantonment was established in 1824. A Municipal Committee was formed in 1834 and regular Municipal administration introduced in 1858. The railway link between Ahmedabad and Bombay was established during the year 1864. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the city had also developed in the direction of the Cantonment, on the east bank, north of Ahmedabad. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the area to the east and north had been absorbed into the city.

After a lapse of another century, Ahmedabad played an outstanding role in the country's struggle for freedom. Mahatma Gandhi after his return from South Africa in 1915 established his famous Ashram on the banks of Sabarmati. The city attracted considerable migration between 1931 and 1941. This was the period when the growth of the textile industry reached its peak and its economy flourished. In the post-independence period, the city witnessed not only diversification of its industrial base but also significant progress in
other spheres of life. During this period the city saw major changes in its physical growth as the city was agglomerated with the surrounding towns and peripheries.

Thus, the third phase was developed by the first half of the twentieth century on the west banks of the river Sabarmati as a residential district and an area of educational and cultural facilities. During this period, east bank too had continued to grow as the textile industry expanded. The growth of the city on the east and west banks continued after independence and further land was taken over. After 1960s, with rapid industrial growth new areas were brought into city limits in 1986. Both areas were incorporated into the Municipal administration. Today, the river Sabarmati divides the city into two parts: the old city on the eastern side and the new city on the western side.

Administratively, the city of Ahmedabad is divided into 43 election wards, which are further divided into five zones, administered by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC). The area beyond the city limits comes under the jurisdiction of Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority (AUDA) which is governed by the respective Nagar-palikas and Gram-panchayats falling under the AUD(A (see Map: 1.1 – City of Ahmedabad).

Thus, spatially, the AMC area has grown from 5.72 sq. km. in 1887 to 190.84 sq. km. in 1991 and the area under the AUDA is 1,330.08 sq. km. Today, total urban area of Ahmedabad exceeds the walled area by more than twenty times (AUD(A, 1992). The population has grown from 0.9 million in 1951 to 3.3 million in 1991 (see table 1.2). The population of the city is 3.5 million in 2001 (Ray: 2003). Thus, in 2020, Ahmedabad is expected to have around 10 million inhabitants (website: gujaratindia.com). The city will, then, become a so-called mega-city (Hesselberg 2002: 24).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Municipal Corporation (AMC)</th>
<th>Urban Agglomeration (AUA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area (sq.km)</td>
<td>Population (million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>52.47</td>
<td>0.84 (41.6)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>92.98</td>
<td>1.15 (37.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>92.98</td>
<td>1.59 (40.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>98.15</td>
<td>2.06 (33.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>190.15</td>
<td>2.88 (39.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures in brackets indicate growth over the previous decade.
Map: 1.1 – City of Ahmedabad

1 - 43 City Election Ward
- - - Old City Boundary
- - - New and Extended City Boundary (Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation)
◊ Nagarpalikas in AUDA (Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority)
## Grampanchayats in AUDA (Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority)
Social characteristics of the city

Along with its geographical expansion, the social and spatial characteristics of the city have also changed at a rapid pace. Mahadevia (2002) describes Ahmedabad as a segmented city. City segmentation is the reflection of duality in the city’s economy. Looking comprehensively at the social, economic and historical development of the city, Yagnik and Nandy (1997) divide it into three Ahmedabads.

The first of which is the five-century old walled city founded by Sultan Ahmed Shah. The area features a number of medieval mosques of Indo-Islamic architectural style and innumerable tightly packed houses (known as Pols)\(^{13}\) along narrow winding lanes, most of which are occupied by a homogeneous community, each with a separate sub-culture. The three major communities – Jains, Hindus and Muslims – living in the city have contributed significantly to the development of this residential distinct culture in this part of the city.

The second Ahmedabad developed during the latter half of the nineteenth century, around old villages on the periphery of the city, after the emergence of the textile industry. Slums and chawls mushroomed around the textile mills and other factories in large numbers (see Chapter II). While this second Ahmedabad retains much of the traditional caste-based lifestyle of the old villages, slums and chawls also carry the imprint of the social composition and segregated diversity of the textile mill workers. Those who migrated into the second city during the 19\(^{th}\) century and in the early decades of 20\(^{th}\) century settled in chawls, and those who migrated after independence were forced to live in slums. Prior to 1980, almost one-third of the textile workers were Dalits\(^{14}\); another third were Muslims.

\(^{13}\) The typical Pol is a small residential unit consisting of a single street with a group of houses. It is a kind of micro neighbourhood, usually protected by a gate at the entrance. Traditionally, the main considerations for living within a particular Pol were the religion and caste of the inhabitants. After the communal riots in 1714 Ahmedabad’s population sought greater security by living together in closely associated groups within Pols. These Pols developed as the process of densification continued; today they are a special feature of old Ahmedabad (Michell and Shah 1988). Some of the recent studies of Pols suggest that constant social conflicts (between these groups) and the need to secure a neighbourhood resulted in the particular typology of the old city (Shibu 2003).

\(^{14}\) Here, the term is used in its inclusive sense of the definition, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes.
The third Ahmedabad is new and is separated from the other two by the river Sabarmati. An elite area, it is populated by the upper and middle-classes with a very small Muslim population and a few Dalit housing colonies and slums. This part of the city hosts most of the modern institutions of higher learning, including the university. In the last decade, the character of this Ahmedabad has changed substantially. In part, this has been influenced by communal riots. After each riot, the middle and upper classes in the walled city felt less secure, and the traders with their shops and the professionals with their practices in the other two Ahmedabads have moved to the new Ahmedabad. The process quickened after 1985, with the rise of multi-storied offices, residential buildings and Singapore-style shopping arcades. This made the elite areas of the new Ahmedabad even more exclusive.

Contemporary Ahmedabad

In the early part of the 20th century, until the 1960s, Ahmedabad’s public life was characterised by a middle class ‘mahajan culture’. It was the businessman’s city (Spodek 2001). However, the Manchester of India was inspired during this period, by the ideals of the Ahimsa and Gandhian ethic. It has been generally appreciated, as M.J. Mehta (1981) points out, that Ahmedabad succeeded in making the transition from a great pre-industrial textile centre to a flourishing modern industrial textile mill centre. However, the transition was neither smooth nor painless.

From the 1960s through the 1990s the city went ‘out of control’ in many ways. During this period the city faced the devastating collapse of the historic textile industry leaving lacks of workers unemployed and marginalized. Ahmedabad, which was ‘a bastion of working class consciousness’, and the trade union movement, which used to be the main platform of resistance against the owners of the textile mills, lost its former momentum (Breman 2002 and 2004). The mobilization of working classes shifted to caste and communal lines. The criminalisation of Ahmedabad’s urban society often resulted in the communal and caste violence of worst types in the history of the city.

The stagnating economy saw a revival only in the decade of 1990s (see Breman 2004). New entrepreneurs carved out new spaces for themselves with new industries; city was once again put on the map of progress. During the last decade, Ahmedabad has seen
the spectacular growth, especially in economic sectors. Today, it serves as a business hub for the entire state with rapid diversion in various industrial and commercial enterprises. The city remains industrial and the commercial capital of the state. It contributes about 14 per cent of the total investments in all stock exchanges in India and 60 per cent of the total productivity of the state.

With increasing wealth, the city displays not only high levels of conspicuous consumption, but also modern life style through its new shopping centers, western type malls and supermarkets. The city of Ahmedabad plays an important role in attracting huge investment into Gujarat. Coinciding with the liberalisation era, a number of corporate offices, including multinational banks, have opened their offices in Ahmedabad in the last few years (Acharya and Parikh 2002). The vision of the Gujarat government is for Ahmedabad to become a world-class science city and a role model for the developing world (website: gujaratindia.com). In Ahmedabad, the project “River Front Development” is an example of common process of modernization (and westernisation) of the built up area in the most attractive part of the city (Hesselberg 2002).

In spite of economic development, the city is lagging behind on many fronts, leaving a large majority at the margins of urban life. Rapid industrialization and urbanization have caused the mushrooming of low-income localities in Ahmedabad i.e. slums and Chawls. Slums which represent illegal occupation of marginal areas of the city by migrants and other economically weaker sections are found along the riverfront, low lying areas, vacant private/government land, etc. Most of the old slums are found in predominantly industrial zone of east Ahmedabad and a subsequent expansion of the city on the western side of the river Sabarmati has also led to a growth of slums in new areas.

The percentage of housing categorized as slums in Ahmedabad increased from 17.2 in 1961 to 22.8 per cent in 1971 and 25.6 per cent of the total population in the city in 1981 (Mehta and Mehta 1989). According to the Census of 1991, within the limit of the AMC, there are 91,188 families living in slums and 133,000 families living in chawls. The last estimates based on Census for the year 1991 shows, that about 41 per cent of the population of Ahmedabad lives in hundreds of slums and chawls scattered all across the city (Ahmedabad Study Action Group 1992). A profile of slums in Ahmedabad indicates
that they are predominantly low-caste settlements, with poor mainly from backward and Scheduled Castes (Acharya and Dijk 1998). In 1991, nearly 14 per cent of the population in the city comprised of SCs and STs, which is the highest amongst all other cities in Gujarat.

The annual surveys by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) revealed that Ahmedabad had 28.6 per cent of the households below poverty line in 1988, which has gone down to 11.4 per cent in 1995-96. However, recently concluded Below Poverty Line (BPL) survey of 191,000 slum households in the AMC area reveals that about 60 per cent of these were below the poverty line (Kundu and Mahadevia 2000). It means that even if there were no poor residing in non-slum areas, 17.2 per cent of the city’s population would be below the poverty line (Bhatt 2003).

The process of social and ethnic segregation in various parts of Ahmedabad is ongoing. Repeated communal violence over the years, the worst among them being the Hindu Muslim riots of 1969, then again the riots of 1985, 1986, 1990 and 1992-93, polarized the Hindu and Muslim communities of the city. Ahmedabad city is nearly divided into two halves: Hindu Ahmedabad and Muslim Ahmedabad (Hesselberg: 2002: 42). Although, Ahmedabad has always been a city of two major religious groups, the Hindus and the Muslims; in recent years the communal divide between them is almost complete. The communal genocide of 2002 ripped apart the social and geographic fabric of the city. The old city is virtually occupied by the Muslims and the new city by the Hindus.

THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to examine the significance of caste in everyday life of a historically marginalized caste community and to investigate empirically what the processes of urbanization and economic development do to such communities in modern democratic society in India. The study assumes that the processes of urbanization, economic development and political democracy have initiated changes in socio-economic and political domains in urban areas, especially for the historically marginalized caste communities like the caste of scavengers. These processes, however, have reinforced caste economy, caste politics and caste identity among marginalized communities in urban India.
The objectives of the study are further specified as following:

- To investigate the life situations (socio-cultural, economic and political) of a historically marginalized caste group and how the group responds to changing context in urban society.

- To what extent and in what different ways does caste continue to influence the life-chances of the marginalized communities in their everyday life in urban India.

- To examine if the historically marginalized caste groups still experience marginalization and exclusion in the changed context or are they being included and integrated into the urban social life.

- And finally to examine how these processes influence/affect the marginalized caste group in the dynamics of their identity formation and in claiming their rights to citizenship in the modern democratic India.

These stated objectives are achieved through investigating broadly following five dimensions related to the life of scavengers in the city of Ahmedabad.

1. **Locating scavengers in the city geography:**
   Identifying residential localities and intra-city residential mobility among them

2. **Scavengers in urban labour market:**
   Their occupations and occupational changes in urban areas

3. **Social relations in the city:**
   The relations of the caste of the scavengers with upper castes and other Dalit groups, with Muslims; the practice of untouchability and its nature in the city

4. **Political life:**
   Political mobilization and participation in the political life of the state and the city

5. **Construction of community and identity formation:**
   Social organization and intra group interactions, significant differences and cohesiveness among scavengers in the city; self-perception of the community and the changing dynamics of identity formation in recent years.
Location of the Study

The city of Ahmedabad has been chosen as the locale of the study mainly for three reasons.

1. The historical city of Ahmedabad has changed drastically over the decades. The city has witnessed various processes of modernization viz. urbanization, industrialisation and globalisation intensely influencing her way of life. Ahmedabad is one of the most urbanized, economically developed and is the centre of socio-political activities in the state. Nevertheless, the city has a large section of its population poor and marginalized. In many ways the city represents the modern state of Gujarat with all its development and deprivations.

2. Being the commercial capital of the state, the city is the most preferred destination for migrants from all across the state. The population of the city consists of people of different socio-cultural and religious traits.

3. The city is one of the largest “corporation cities” of the state employing the highest number of scavengers for sanitary functions. Nearly 17 per cent of the total Bhangi population of the state live in the city of Ahmedabad predominantly engaged in scavenging activities in organized as well as in informal sector. It is here that the highest number of scavengers are concentrated in one geographical location, coming from different parts of Gujarat. It represents the variety and ‘complexities’ of the Bhangis, the caste of the scavengers.

The city, in this context provides an appropriate environment to investigate the urban life of a marginalized caste community.

The Problem of Terminology

At the outset of this study, in the context of Ahmedabad, I would like to clarify three terms central to the study, i.e. Bhangi, Valmiki, and Scavenger. Defining these terms is problematic as all three are referred to as the same “group” with overlapping shades of meanings. But they have different connotations. The existence of all three in sociological
discourse and in normal vocabulary gives rise to a dilemma as to which would be the appropriate term for a study on the community.

1. Bhangi is a caste category. The term “Bhangi” is used as an official nomenclature for the caste group for the census enumeration as well as for other official purposes. The upper castes, other Dalits and a section within the Bhangi community use this nomenclature to refer to the community as a whole. However, over the years, the term has derived negative and derogatory connotations, associated with degrading traditional occupations. However, the usage of this term is avoided by a section of the community, who prefer to call themselves “Valmikis”.

2. The term “Valmiki” has evolved as an alternative to the term Bhangi, and also as a result of the growing assertion among the upwardly mobile members of the Bhangi caste (see details in chapters VI and IX). The name is derived from Maharishi Valmiki, the ‘low-caste’ creator of the Ramayana. While the term Bhangi refers to the caste of the scavengers, the term Valmiki does not directly refer to the occupation but an assertive identity of the group.

3. The term scavenger refers to sanitation workers. Scavenger or sanitation worker is an English terminology, equivalent to the Hindi term Safai-karmachari. Although the nomenclature ‘Safai-karmachari’ commonly refers to those who work as sanitation workers in organized sector, it includes, sweepers and scavengers engaged in the cleaning of pubic toilets, clearing manholes, doing post-mortem operations and disposing of dead bodies.

In some quarters a distinction is made between scavengers and sweepers. Sweeping is considered more hygienic and non-polluting sanitation work, whereas scavenging is polluting, unclean and degrading. Secondly, in recent years in the urban areas “cleaners” are employed for cleaning and mopping of the residential complexes, private bungalows, private institutions, hospitals and offices. These cleaners do not engage in toilet cleaning and other “dirty” works. Scavengers of the Bhangi caste are mostly employed to clean public toilets, gutters and drainages, sweeping roads and nuisance spots and open spaces outdoors. Some of the private
scavengers, who work as “cleaners” are from other Dalit communities like Vankars and Rohits, and Other Backwards Castes like Vaghris and Rabaris.

With this conceptual clarification, the study uses the above-mentioned three terms in the following framework:

1. The term “scavenger” would include an individual engaged in every type of sanitation work (cutting across the distinction of scavengers, sweepers and cleaners) in organized or/and informal sector.

2. In Gujarat the “Bhangi” is the traditional caste of the scavengers. Almost all scavengers in Ahmedabad belong to the traditional caste of “Bhangi”. The caste of the Bhangis and the occupation of scavenging are closely associated, making the terms Bhangi and scavenger synonymous. The question, whether ‘caste’ or ‘occupation’ should be the parameter while defining the “scavenger” does not necessarily arise.

3. In this study, the derogatory nature of the nomenclature “Bhangi” is recognized. However, taking into consideration the perceptions of the majority of the respondents, the term “Bhangi” is retained, referring to the caste of the scavengers. The term “Valmiki” also refers to the caste of the scavengers and is used in this study to refer to the upwardly mobile section of the community.

4. Thus, the term “scavenger” would be closely associated with the occupation, whereas the terms “Valmiki” and/or “Bhangi” would be referred to the community of scavengers. The study of scavengers would necessarily deal with the community of the Bhangis.

SUBJECT MATTER OF THE STUDY

The subject matter of this study is presented in three major sections divided into ten chapters. The first section comprises of two chapters dealing with “the problem and its investigation”. The first chapter, introductory in nature contextualizes the research problem and the field area of the study. It introduces the central question and the objectives of the
study. The second chapter presents the conceptual framework within which the research work was carried-out and describes the methodology adopted for the investigation.

The second section contains three chapters, focusing on “the scavengers of Ahmedabad” as an occupational group. Chapter three presents the profile of the respondents, providing the socio-economic conditions of the scavengers in the city based on a baseline survey. The fourth chapter deals with the occupations of the scavengers in the urban context, exploring continuities and change in occupation among the scavengers in the city. Chapter five examines the everyday working life of the scavengers in the urban labour market.

The “caste of the scavengers” is the focus of the third section, consisting of four chapters. The sixth chapter describes the social organization of the Bhangis as a community in the city of Ahmedabad. It explores various dimensions of their collectivity encompassing cohesiveness and differences among the members living in the city. Looking at the caste of the scavengers as a community, chapter seven examines the social life of the caste, and chapter eight investigates the political life of the community. The inter-relatedness of caste and politics in the urban life of the Bhangis is the focus of these chapters. The ninth chapter deals with mobility and identity formation among the scavengers. This chapter focuses on the responses of the caste community of the scavengers to urban life in cultural, social, political and economic spheres.

Finally, the concluding chapter highlights the main findings of the study and the larger issues thrown open by the study. The chapter makes an effort to understand the role of the “processes of modernization” and the “institution of caste” in contemporary India from the point of view of the marginalized caste communities by describing what is happening to the Bhangis, the caste of the scavengers in Ahmedabad.