Profile of Ahmedabad city
CHAPTER - II
Profile of Ahmedabad City

The various characteristics and the history of the community impinge upon and vitally affect its members. So, a brief description of the locale - Ahmedabad - selected for the present study is in order.

Ahmedabad, is the premier city of Gujarat State with a population of 2876710 (Census of India, 1991). Before the capital of the state was shifted to the newly built town of Gandhinagar in 1970-71, Ahmedabad also served as the state's natural capital.

Geographically, the city is on 23° North latitude and 72° 37' East longitude. It occupies an area of 191 Sq. Km and the density of population works out to 15074 person per square Km (Census of India, 1991).

The city was established in AD 1411 on the eastern bank of the river Sabarmati, somewhere near Karnavati or Asawali by Sultan Ahmad Shah, after whom it was named Ahmedabad. Right from its inception, the city was an important centre of trade and commerce located as it was on the trade routes linking Gujarat with Rajasthan, Malwa and Delhi on the one hand and Saurashtra and Bombay on the other. Unlike many other urban centres, Ahmedabad was unique in a number of ways. Though located on the trade routes it was sufficiently far away and secluded from the northern part of India from where most of the invaders had come. Because of that Ahmedabad lacked the cosmopolitan character of an urban centre of its size. Secondly, it had well-developed commercial character and its trade and industry was in the hands of Hindus, Vaishnavas, Banias and Jain septs and Sarafs. These communities/castes were the dominant well-knit elite group of the city, who had supplanted the ritually dominant Brahmin caste and relegated the latter to the second position in the traditional caste hierarchy. Because of this predominance of business class there was a corresponding de-emphasis on the feudal class and culture.

The Jains and Vaishnavas religions of the trading communities provided an additional character of conservatism with their values of non-violence and vegetarianism. This conservatism was further supported by the traditional system of guilds (Mahajans as they are called in local parlance) which restricted the entry of foreigners to the commercial life of the city. The guilds were also responsible for taming social conflict within the city. Thus, conservative and peaceful culture of the city was a result of a number of factors like city's geographical location, the dominant religious values of the trading communities, the relative absence and traditional institutions of the guild or the mahajans (Masihi, et al, 1989:33-34).
During the British Period, most of the leading urban centres like Delhi, Calcutta, Madras and Bombay came under the direct impact of the British culture. However, the British presence was never obstructive in Ahmedabad. The traditional culture of the city did not register any significant change in spite of the introduction of British education and political system. However, unlike other urban centres of India, Ahmedabad was quick in adopting the new technology. It gradually became the Manchester of India, with about 50 textile mills established as early as 1906. The number rose to a maximum of 76 mills by 1940. In spite of Manchesterization of the city, it maintained its traditional social structure and the way of life. Gandhiji who started the political career in Ahmedabad helped build the Textile Labour Association, a trade union of textile mill workers, in tune with the spirit of the traditional guilds or Mahajans. It is significant that he called the TLA as Major Mahajan or guild of workers (Masihi, et al, 1989:33).

After independence, with rapid expansion of industries and commercial establishments, Ahmedabad became one of the fastest growing cities of India, both in terms of population and spatial spread. The expansion of the city Municipal area was substantial (40 sq. km) during 1951-61. By 1991, the city Municipal area went up to 190.15 sq.km. The population of the city has been growing at a rate of about 40% per decade. This is in consonance with the rapid rate of urbanization in this state as a whole. The decennial growth of the population during 1961-71 was 37.88% per cent, but it has declined to 27.71% per cent in 1971-81 and during 1981-91 it has come down to 20.79% per cent perhaps partly due to the spatial sprawl outside Municipal limits (Kulkarni, 1983:29). In 1991, the population of the Ahmedabad was 2876710 and Ahmedabad city agglomeration alone had a population of 3312216 persons which is nearly 23.24% per cent of the urban population of Gujarat State. More than 66.87% per cent of the population of the city is literate. The city has predominantly Hindu population (78.10%), Muslim constitute (14.16%), Jains, Christian and Sikhs form 5.43 per cent and 0.29 per cent respectively. Gujarati is the mother tongue of a majority (70.75%) of the population. The other important languages spoken by the people are Urdu (11.79%), Hindi (8.67%), Marathi (3.0%) Marwadi (1.66%) and Sindhi 1.27% (Gujarat State Gazetters, Ahmedabad 1984:183).

In the course of its growth the city has undergone changes from various direction. Physically, the city has developed into three distinct area, i) the walled city ii) the eastern outer area and iii) the western outer area. The walled city constitutes the traditional part of the city with its numerous poles having house both side of the narrow street and entrance at both the ends which can be closed at night or in the event of emergency. Kulkarni, (1984) and Anjana Desai, (1984) who have studied Ahmedabad from the point of view of human settlement, described the walled city as the core area of Ahmedabad. In 1971, this area comprising of 5 per cent of the total area of the city was holding 30%
per cent of the city population. In 1981, it holds 23% per cent of the total population. This is because more and more people are going out of this area either due to stagnant economy or due to frequent communal/caste riots. In 1971 the eastern zone occupied 53 percent of the city area with 52.98 per cent of the population. This has gone to 58.98 per cent in 1981. This area has been a traditional zone for low income industrial workers with high proportion of city slums. The western zone consists of 41 per cent of the city area and in 1971 it use to hold 17 per cent of its population. In 1981, this has increased to 21 per cent inspite of this increase the density of population in this area has remained relatively low. Though 21 per cent of the slum dwellers live here it remains pre-dominantly affluent area of the city. During 1981-91, the city has been restructured and re-organised zone wise, the detail of which can be seen in table 2.1

Table 2.1: Zonewise House Holds Population Sexwise population and Density 1991:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Zone</th>
<th>Area Sq.km</th>
<th>No. of House holds</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Density of population (per sq.km)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Zone</td>
<td>17.63</td>
<td>109290</td>
<td>617273</td>
<td>323060</td>
<td>294215</td>
<td>911 35013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Zone</td>
<td>36.38</td>
<td>116363</td>
<td>575433</td>
<td>300686</td>
<td>274747</td>
<td>914 15817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Zone</td>
<td>41.92</td>
<td>123284</td>
<td>646138</td>
<td>345010</td>
<td>301128</td>
<td>875 15414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Zone</td>
<td>29.66</td>
<td>117214</td>
<td>605303</td>
<td>325258</td>
<td>280045</td>
<td>861 20408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Zone</td>
<td>65.25</td>
<td>86013</td>
<td>432563</td>
<td>228961</td>
<td>203602</td>
<td>889 6629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>190.84</td>
<td>552164</td>
<td>2876710</td>
<td>1522975</td>
<td>1355735</td>
<td>889 15074</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The city was once called Manchester of India, because it had 86 textile mills. Of late some 26 textile mills have been closed down. Thus textile industry is generally losing its predominance as a result of which nearly 50000 textile workers have been rendered un-employed. Various other industries like chemical, iron and steel, machine tools, machine spare parts, pharmaceutical, small scale and cottage
industries both in the organised and unorganised sector have also come up in the city. The number of various small and big registered factories during 1989 was 3756 and the average number of workers working in these factories were 20209 (Statistical outline of Ahmedabad city 1991-92:156). The total number of main workers engaged in various classified industrial categories in 1991 were 831159 (census of India 1991: i.e. 28.9% per cent of the total population of the city. These industries have not only been the major source of employment for the people of Gujarat but also for the people of other states as well. To meet the financial and other needs of these industries, a number of commercial and business establishments have grown to make Ahmedabad the economic capital of Gujarat. The city perhaps has the largest number of rich families of Gujarat, but at the same time its prosperity has not percolated to the lower strata of the society in that a large majority of its population still lives in abject poverty.

Ahmedabad being an industrial city, it attracts people from all parts of the country. According to 1971 census, the number of migrants to Ahmedabad was 769780, out of which the number of rural migrants from remote and nearby areas was 1668930, which is quite significant. Like other cities of similar size Ahmedabad attracts more and more people from poor sections of the society. Though the city is located in the drought prone area of the country it receives large number of rural migrants at every three or four years interval. As per 1981 census the percentage of male and female migration from rural area to Ahmedabad was 19.59 and 29.29 respectively. Of these migrants 32.2 per cent males migrated in search of employment while women migrated to Ahmedabad mainly due to family movement (34.2%) and marriage (27.8%) (Kamla Gupta, 1988: 136-186).

Thus rural to urban migration in majority of the cases in Ahmedabad is mainly due to search of employment. Most of these migrants from rural areas work as unskilled/semi-skilled and menial workers. Their women sometime work along with them or separately work as maid servants. Their children work as helpers at teashops, wayside eating houses, laundries, garbage, cycle repair shops, parking attendants, newspaper vendors, domestic servants while sometimes work as shoe-shine boys, scrap collectors, ragpickers etc. A few of these children often resort to begging, bootlegging, stealing or/and other anti-social activities.

With the rapid growth of the city and influx of population, people face problem of shelter. The shortage of houses in big towns has resulted in emergence of several slums. A large majority of migrants live in slums and a few of them are found living on footpaths or in shanty dwellings. In 1962-63 there were 27.9 million slum dwellers which represents 18.8 percent urban population of the country. The cities of 10 lakh and more number 12 which contain 12.9 million slum dwellers which is 30.8 per cent of the total population. (Hand Book of Housing statistics 1984). Slums and squatter settlements in 1971 accounted for 67 per cent of the population of Calcutta, 41 per cent of Bombay and
36 per cent of Delhi. (World Housing Survey: 1974). Similarly in Ahmedabad, there are over 1400 chawls (Mishra 1978:212) and 1116 slums (CORE Consultants:1984:68). These chawls are mostly situated in the vicinity of textile mills, whereas slum dwellers reside in the eastern outer area (where industrial function are dominant) and also in the western outer area of the city. It is estimated that 39.7 per cent of the population of Ahmedabad lives in slums and chawls (statistical outline of Ahmedabad city 1984-85:210-211). Forty per cent of the workforce among slum dwellers is dependent upon casual work whereas 15-17 per cent are self-employed (CORE Consultants 1984:69-70). Nearly 40 per cent of the slum population is below 15 years of age. Although Municipal Corporation of Ahmedabad has made primary education free and compulsory for the children below 14 years of age, a large number of children—especially from slums and chawls—do not go to school and a good number of them do so because of economic hardship of their parents. They work in unorganised sector either to earn their livelihood or to financially support their families.

As already mentioned, due to closure of more than 25 textile mills, more than 50,000 workers have been rendered unemployed. The plight of these workers and their family members has been reported in various studies and newspapers from time to time. Some of the important reports based on the study conducted by 'VISTAS'—a voluntary organisation have appeared in The Times of India (May 10, 1989), (May 16, 1989) and another study by Kaushik Mehta reported in Gujarati daily Sandesh (July 12, 1989). These reports reveal the deplorable conditions of the families of the industrial workers. The closure of mills has also given a setback to auxiliary industries and workers employed in these industries. Thus the closure of mills has not only increased unemployment and under-employment amongst industrial workers but has also compelled their family members, especially women and children to earn for their own survival as well as for their families. This has led to increase in the existing number of child labour in Ahmedabad.

According to a survey conducted by School Board, Municipal Corporation, Ahmedabad in February 1979, there were as many as 2800 children not going to school in the city. Out of these 1800 children were reported as not going to school because they were working as labourers to supplement the income of their families. This is in spite of the facts that education is compulsory and free for all children of school going age (5-14 years). It shows that a big chunk of the population between 5-14 years does not go to school and work as labourer in the unorganised sector or are self-employed.

According to 1981 census, Ahmedabad city had a total of 899,724 children in the age group of 6-14 years, out of which 471,331 were males and 428,393 were female. The number of working children were 5209 which is 0.60 per cent of the total population. As per 1991 census, out of 2,876,710 persons 434,080 (15.09 per cent) are less than 6 years of age and 482,262 children (16.77%) (both boys & girls) are attending the primary schools managed by Municipal Corporation, Ahmedabad and primary school managed by private
education trusts (Statistical outline of Ahmedabad city 1991-92:121-122) which means that nearly 32% of the total children of Ahmedabad city from 0-14 years are either very small children below six years or attending primary schools (managed by Municipal Corporation or private education trusts). According to 1991 census the population of children between 0-14 years is 33 per cent of the total population. If it is true about Ahmedabad then nearly 6% of these children are not attending schools, they may be either loitering on the streets of Ahmedabad or are employed in the unorganised sector as wage labour or self-employed.

As mentioned in the review of literature in Chapter-I in Gujarat State a few studies Pathak, (1984) Srinivasan,(1986) Jain and Pandya, (1985) Jani Gaurang, (1985) Pichhattia, (1980) Singh, (1992) on Child labour have been reported. These surveys have not projected severally or jointly a comprehensive picture of the problem because of their limited coverage and scope. The problem had its broken manifestation and obstructive visibility specially in three metropolitan towns Ahmedabad, Baroda and Surat where its mechanics and dynamics have not been probed in sufficient depth by these studies. It is felt that a holistic study covering the sociological and economic aspects of the problem be taken up. It is also intended to study the hazards involved in the jobs and the consequences of such work for the future of such children. The effectiveness of legislative procedures to prohibit and regulate the prevailing system of child workers in the city will be probed into.

The detailed information regarding the study is given in different chapters. The next chapter will describe the profile of child workers and their families.