CHAPTER 3

AHMEDABAD CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE: 1856-1919

During the period of study, Ahmedabad witnessed the rapid growth of the cotton textile industry. Migrant labour came to work in the textile mills of the city. Gradually, living space got congested, leading to health and sanitation problems. The traditional methods of water supply and drainage were no longer efficient. This Chapter attempts to look into colonial interventions to transform the city space and the local initiatives at Civic improvement.

AHMEDABAD, THE CITYSCAPE:

Ahmedabad’s growth was rapid as the capital of the flourishing Gujarat Sultanate since it’s inception in 1411. In its design and layout, it resembled the Islamic cities of India and the Muslim world.¹ The citadel (Bhadra), east of Sabarmati River contained the royal enclosure and the mosque (Jama Masjid). The areas around Manek Chowk comprised the central market complex and beyond Bhadra were the residences of the noblemen, merchants and artisans.

Around Bhadra, were clustered trade, commerce and manufacturing centres, and also palatial houses. However, population pressure forced the nobles to develop their own suburban settlements, beyond the Western bank of the Sabarmati River. The toponyms of the puras (residential areas) are after the name of their founders (like Kalupur, Tajpur, Akbarpur, Jamalpur, Daryapur, Shahpur, Mirzapur etc.). The fluctuating fortunes of their patrons affected the puras. Apart from the Jama Masjid, in the

¹ A.M. Hurani and S.M. Stern (ed.), The Islamic City, Oxford, 1970, pp.21-23. (For chief features of the Islamic Cities of the Middle East and their urban characteristics).
immediate vicinity of Bhadra, was Manek Chowk and Teen Darwaja, the hub of economic activities around which settled the mercantile and business communities in highly concentrated settlements at Javeriwad (jeweler’s mart), Kagdipith (paper mart), Danapith (grain mart), Khas Bazar etc. Closer to Bhadra, settled another group of merchants who were mainly dealers in arms and hardware and fulfilled the military needs of the state. This area was known as Dhalgarod and Salapith where military hardware and arms were produced and sold respectively. Bhadra was the political and administrative nucleus, the inner commercial ring and the areas beyond Jama Masjid, upto Manek Chowk was the commercial centre. Such a pattern of city growth was similar to Delhi and Agra.

Apart from noblemen, Sufi saints and big merchants established many puras. Thus while Usmanpura, Saraspur, Rasulabad, Bibipur were built by religious personages; suburbs like Rajpur, Idalpur, Medhanpur etc. were founded by big merchants like Shantidas Zaveri and his descendents.

The suburban growth gave Ahmedabad a definite shape and urban characteristics. Initially, the city had a rectangular shape and then assumed a distinctive semi-circular shape (locally known as 'Dhanushkodi' or curved like a bow) with the growth of new settlements.

Based on the 1881 census, H.K. Naqvi has estimated the aggregate population of Ahmedabad, including people inside the fort as between 36-

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4 For details on puras founded by nobles and Sufi saints see Mirat-i-Ahmad (supplement), Ali Mohammad Khan, Tr. By S. Nawab Ali and C.N. Seddon, Baroda, 1928, pp.10-17. For puras founded by Jain merchants see Jain Atithihasik Gujar Kavya Granth, cited by R.B. Jote, in Gujarat Nu Paatnagar Ahmedabad, Ahmedabad, 1929, pp.178-212.
5 R.N. Mehta and R. Jamindar, op.cit, p.20.
40 lakhs.⁶ When the British took over the city (1817), the population was estimated at 80,000.⁷ The contemporary sources must have exaggerated the figures, but official accounts are also not authentic, as people may have avoided giving proper information to escape higher taxes.

A peculiar feature of Ahmedabad is its great number of house groups, *pols*, literally gates. These seem to date from 1738-53, the *pol* gate and watch offered necessary protection from robbers.⁸ Such enclosed residential patterns were necessitated during the turbulent Maratha rule.

Each *pol* or house group had only one or at most two entrances, protected by a gateway, closed in the evening as a safeguard against thieves. Inside was one main street with crooked lines branching on either side. Most *pols* varied in size from 5 or 10 to 50 to 60 houses. For example, *Mandvi pol* in Jamalpur area was the largest, including 12 sub-*pols* containing 5000 houses.⁹ Most of the *pols* had been established and provided with a gateway, at the expense of some leading man whose name the *pol* in many cases bore and whose family was highly respected as the head of the *pol*. Each *pol* had generally its own watchman and its own sanitary arrangement. The house property in the *pol* was to some extent held in common. No man could sell or mortgage a house to an outsider without first offering it to the people of the *pol*.¹⁰ However, documents in Gujarati and Persian clearly establish the individual property rights of the *pol* members including that of women. A large number of such documents deal with the property transactions (sale or mortgage) involving persons of

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different castes as also between resident and non-resident pol members, dispelling the earlier notions about the nature of these pols.\textsuperscript{11}

Such transactions took place between the Hindu and Muslim residents of these pols.\textsuperscript{12} Among the neighbours of Shantidas Zaveri, the famous jeweller merchant of Ahmedabad in the seventeenth century who resided in Zaveriwald, one was Guru Rajvijay Suri, one Englishman and one Muslim, Bohra.\textsuperscript{13}

Very significantly, a house was never sold to people of the low caste. When a house was sold or mortgaged, the people of the pol had a right to claim from one-half to two percent of the money received. Again, on wedding and other occasions, each householder was expected to offer a feast to the entire pol. Similarly all householders were expected to attend any funeral that may take place. If the pol rules were slighted, the offender was fined and in former times, till he paid, he was not allowed to light a lamp in his house or to give a feast. The money gathered from gifts, fines and the percentage on house property sales, formed a common fund managed by the leaders (sheths) of the pols. This was spent on repairs to the pol gate, the pol privies or the pol well. The polio or gatekeeper was not paid out of the fund. He earned his living by begging from the people of the pol and worked as a labourer for them.\textsuperscript{14}

Big pols contained within it sub pols, khadkis (lanes) and khanchas (uneven and narrow curves). A modern expert has defined a pol as a

\textsuperscript{11} To illustrate, one Lakchand of Kansara (coppersmith caste) mortgaged his house situated in Nagji Bhudar pol (part of Mandvi pol) in Ahmedabd, to one Nanderain, of Brahmin caste for Rs.275, Khatpatra no.21, GAR No.8842, B.J. Institute of Research and Learning, Ahmedabad, document dated 1727 A.D.

\textsuperscript{12} As cited by Rakesh Kumar, Towns, Bazars and the Working Population of Ahmedabad Region During the 17th and 18th Centuries, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Delhi University, 2000, for specific examples, see, p.56.


\textsuperscript{14} Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, 1879, pp.294-95.
residential street with well-defined boundaries demarcated through a main gateway which was closed at night as a safeguard against thieves. The enclosed area of big *pols* contained streets too narrow for wheeled traffic. These *pols* had well-defined jurisdiction with a strong sense of community organization. These residential areas have been termed as ‘micro-neighbourhoods’, binding the families residing in them under certain rules and regulations and creating a sense of belonging among them.\(^{15}\)

Traditionally, the main consideration for living within a particular *pol* were the religion and caste of the individuals, where the “rich *sheths* of Ahmedabad lived in the *pols* among the caste fellows, rich and poor alike”.\(^{16}\) Similar residential patterns could also be seen in the Islamic cities of Aleppo, Cairo and Damascus, where different religious or ethnic groups lived apart to seek the protection of their own members.\(^{17}\)

Though enclosed, the *pols* were not isolated ghettos, but adjacent streets of the city neighbourhood. The social relations that existed in these *pols* must be seen in the context of the overall urban environment, characterized by the co-existence of Hindus of various castes as well as non-Hindu groups such as Jains, Muslims and Parsis, a high degree of monetisation and contractual and market relations, existence of trade guilds etc.

In 1858, the Municipality was established and constituted into a city Municipality in 1872. Besides the two square miles within the city walls, *Saraspur* – a town of about 52 acres, and 55 acres of the Railway suburb in the east came in the municipal limits. Outside the town wall, *Saraspur* and

\(^{15}\) Harish Doshi, *Traditional Neighborhood in a Modern City*, New Delhi, 1974, p.33.


the Railway suburb formed distinct divisions. For municipal purposes, the city was divided into 4 divisions: Shahpur in the North West, Dariapur in the Northeast, Khadiya in the South East, and Jamalpur in the South West. Each of the city division had a municipal inspector, the Khadiya charge including the Railway Suburb and the Dariapur charge including Saraspur.\footnote{Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, op.cit, pp.311-312.}

Like in other cities, the cantonment in Ahmedabad was cleaner than the old city areas and better managed. Sir John Malcolm set up the cantonment in Ahmedabad in 1830. The sanitary arrangements were under the control of the cantonment. During the period of our study, there were 5 hospitals, wells and the river yielded plentiful water supply. The lanes were airy, well built and shaded. The natural surface drainage was good. Conservancy was better managed in the cantonment than in the rest of the city. The cantonment police was under the management of a cantonment magistrate.\footnote{Ibid.}

In Ahmedabad, the core areas clustering around the castle and the City Square were peopled principally by high status Hindu and Jain families employed in business, government service, and the professions, along with dependents who provided personal services to these families. By contrast, the puras, consisted largely of cohesive collectivities of artisans and petty traders and a few self-contained families of more prosperous traders. Often the lanes and roads of a mohalla ended in a cul-de-sac, making movement from one area to another difficult. No separate work place or distinct central business district developed here. What did exist were localities, which were centres of wholesale trade in specific commodities or residential areas of different castes and communities,
many of whom were engaged in a particular occupation or in the manufacturing of a particular commodity.\textsuperscript{20}

There were not many English civilians or soldiers in Ahmedabad. The hot and dry climate was not conducive nor was there much amusement for the foreigners. The British cantonment, the headquarters of the northern division of the Bombay Army, was three and a half miles north of the walled city. The English civil officers at Ahmedabad included the Collector (District Magistrate), the district Judge, the Executive Engineer, the Civil Surgeon, the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent of Police and the City Survey Officer. The natives constituted the bulk of the civil administration. The absence of a sizeable English business community and the traditional techniques of doing business meant that the highly unequal division of power, of dominant dependent relationship that existed between colonizers and colonized, developed gradually. Unlike in Bombay, there did not emerge a distinctive spatiality of European agency houses, banks and companies, and other institutions of economic and political control.\textsuperscript{21}

The setting up of the cotton mill industry led to significant changes in the socio-economic milieu of the city. The emergence of the industrial proletariat was facilitated by the disintegration of handloom weaving and spinning under the impact of foreign merchandise and local machine made goods. Let us look into the changes in the occupational demography of the city in this period.

\textsuperscript{20} In her study of colonial Lucknow, Veena Oldenburg points out on the social security and political protection provided by such spatial arrangements. These cul-de-sacs were structurally very important in keeping a mohalla compact and private, to control and limit traffic and to preserve the community spirit and integration that was typical of the city's neighbourhood. See, V.T. Oldenburg, The Making of Colonial Lucknow 1856-77, Princeton, 1984, p.39.

\textsuperscript{21} For a detailed analysis on changes in Bombay's spatial structure, see Mariam Dossal, Imperial Designs and Indian Realities, the Planning of Bombay City, 1845-1875, OUP, 1991, pp.15-20.
**Occupational Demography**

When the first mill started its operations in 1861, its workforce comprised 63 men drawn from the local area; their castes and religion is not known. By 1879, Ahmedabad had four mills with a labour force totaling 2,013, including a few high and middle caste workers like Brahmins, Vaniyas and Kanbis. The rest were reported to be Muslims, Kolis, Marathas, Pardesis, Bawahas, Vaghris and Marvadis. The Brahmins, highest in the caste hierarchy, were traditionally priests and bureaucrats but in the rural context individual families and even sub-castes were often poor priestly functionaries dependent upon the patronage of the cultivators. Vaniyas were associated with trade and money lending and Kanbis constituted mainly the peasantry, debt ridden, but reputed for their skill and enterprise. Most Kanbis were involved in agriculture and represented the “bulk of the peasant proprietors or yeomanry in Ahmedabad District”.

Many of the “labouring” populations had a low social status. Muslims had generally experienced an economic decline since the imposition of British rule over Ahmedabad in 1817. A report in 1854 ranked only a few Muslims as wealthy, the majority-sought employment as peons, weavers and labourers as was the case earlier also though they could depend on state patronage also. The Kolis and Marathas were low caste Hindus, amongst whom the Kolis represented the district’s largest caste group, constituting 28 percent.

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23 *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency*, 1879, p.132.
25 Ibid, p.36.

* The Kolis had an unsettled history and during the Maratha period many of them were in revolt against the upper castes as well as the government. Generally, regarded as outcasts, the Kolis lived in separate bands, distinct from other communities, *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency*, 1879, pp.36-37.
who were involved in agriculture, and also employed as village watchmen, traders and labourers.\textsuperscript{27} The low caste \textit{vaghris}\textsuperscript{28} were considered the major beneficiaries of modern industrial development in Ahmedabad since they experienced some upward economic mobility through factory employment.\textsuperscript{29} Their population in the district was 13,162, being landless, they survived by rearing fowls, hunting, begging and offering their labour.\textsuperscript{30}

The majority of the cotton mill workers were either Muslims\textsuperscript{31} or \textit{Vaghris}, who used to work as astrologers and beggars. The untouchable castes of \textit{Dheds} and \textit{Vankars} too were drawn into the factory circuit. Displaced from handloom production, the \textit{Dheds} and \textit{Vankars} were forced to migrate to the cotton mills of Ahmedabad.\textsuperscript{32}

As a result of the displacement of handicraft production, by 1890 many of the workers in the weaving sections of the mills were recruited from families, which once had engaged in handloom weaving.\textsuperscript{33} “In Ahmedabad and Surat only does there seem to be a permanent class of workers who do not look forward to going back to agriculture. Ahmedabad appears to be the only great center of the cotton industry that possesses what may be called a separate mill population”.\textsuperscript{34} The majority of the mill workers derived their livelihood solely from factory employment.\textsuperscript{35} By the 1920s, compared to other Indian cities, Ahmedabad was unique in its

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency}, pp.37, 45.
\textsuperscript{28} According to Enthoven, the \textit{Vaghris}, who follow Hinduism, “probably belong to the \textit{Bagri} tribe inhabiting the Bagar country, a tract between the South Western border of Hariana and the Shara in the United Provinces”. (Vol. III, \textit{The Tribes and Castes of Bombay}, Bombay, 1920, p.399.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency}, p.133.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. p.39.
\textsuperscript{31} Ahmedabad District had the biggest proportion of Muslims in British Gujarat comprising 9.8 percent of the district’s entire population. Of the total male adult Muslims numbering 28,904 in 1872, nearly half (13,662) were engaged in mechanical arts and manufacture. W.H. Hunter, \textit{The Imperial Gazetteer of India}, Vol.I, London, 1885, p.40.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. p.419.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid. 1895, p.105.
“purely industrial” character wherein over half the population was “engaged” in industry. Some of the weavers and spinners had settled in Ahmedabad for many generations and included landless Muslims engaged in weaving along with Dhed spinners. The labourers originating from outside the city limits were not just migratory, but often remained in their jobs and were unlikely to withdraw permanently to their villages. Their integration into industrial employment was underlined by the practice amongst the workers that when they visited their villages they engaged substitutes to work their machines, thereby guaranteeing job security during their leave of absence.

The prevailing discrimination against certain caste groups was also reflected in the employment pattern of the mill industry. The fear of ritual pollution often led to protests over the Dheds presence in the mills. In Ahmedabad, the workers protested when the presence of a Dhed was discovered in a spinning mill. Although the Vankars were employed in the spinning section of the mills, they could not be employed alongside the non-polluting caste workers in the weaving section. The labour patterns in the mill industry reflected the prevailing social hierarchy. Unsurprisingly, the high castes and Muslims worked in better paid weaving and other sections, while the Vaghris, Dheds, Vankars, Chamars (low castes) were confined to lower paid spinning and frame department. The workers observed commensality. Muslim workers ate separately from

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38 Ibid.
40 *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency*, 1879, p.80.
41 Ibid. p.48.
42 *Royal Commission..... 1929*, op.cit, p.4.
their fellow high-caste workers.\textsuperscript{44} Even the low castes of \textit{Vaghris, Rawuls} etc. ate separately, and the \textit{Kanbis} demanded separate dinning sheds.\textsuperscript{45}

During the 1920s, 45 percent of the total labour force in the cotton mills came from within the city and district of Ahmedabad itself, and as high as 80 percent from the Gujarati-speaking region.\textsuperscript{46}

Some workers were recruited from amongst the so-called ‘criminal tribes’ settled in Ahmedabad.\textsuperscript{47} They were confined by law to their settlements during the night, required to report to the police daily, and were barred from joining any associations, including a trade union. The rest of the workers were suspicious of them because of such a prohibition.\textsuperscript{48}

The deplorable living conditions of the workers worsened their material deprivation. This was reflected in the high mortality rate among the workers, twice that of Poona and one and a half times that of Surat.\textsuperscript{49} The mortality rate was 50 per thousand of population in Ahmedabad in 1920, while infant mortality rate was 360 per thousand live births.\textsuperscript{50} The residential areas of the workers were adjacent to the mills, lacking basic infrastructure, like potable water supply.\textsuperscript{51}

The mill owners failed to provide proper housing and the workers had to depend on private landlords. The workers lived in one-room tenements or \textit{chawls}, with common toilets. Further, such housing was conditional, depending upon continued employment. This curtailed their

\textsuperscript{44} Report of the Indian Factory Commission, September 1890, p.61.  
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. p.66.  
\textsuperscript{46} Royal Commission..... 1929, op.cit., 1929, p.2.  
\textsuperscript{48} Salim Lakha, op.cit. p.93.  
\textsuperscript{49} Bhagwanlal Badshah, \textit{The Life of Rao Bahadur Ranchodlal Chotalal}, Bombay, 1899, p.38.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, p.144.
freedom to organize.\textsuperscript{52} The congested one-room tenements lacked adequate water supply, toilets and sanitation.\textsuperscript{53} Regardless of their income levels and background, all categories of mill workers lived in such dismal housing conditions.\textsuperscript{54}

The workers laboured hard and long: seven days throughout the year; religious holidays gave respite for 15 to 20 days in a year. There were neither safety devices nor compensation for injury. Prior to 1891, there was no fixed rule for women and children toiling under such harsh conditions.\textsuperscript{55}

The initial attempts at factory legislation were to provide the mills with a stable labour supply. Though many Acts did not directly affect the textile industry such as the Madras Planters’ Labour Act or the Assam Plantation Labour Emigration Act, which were passed to penalize labourers who left their jobs.\textsuperscript{56} However, Indian reformers pressurized the Government to enact legislation for better working conditions. Also, the Lancashire industry was worried that the rapid growth of Indian textiles mills would affect the import of their manufactures. The Bombay Government appointed a Commission in 1875 to investigate the working conditions in the textile mills. But it was not until the Indian Factories Act of 1911 that the working hours for men in the textile mills were limited to 12 hours a day. The hard labour affected their health and they were forced to quit millwork at the age of 40 to 45 years, when according to the Ahmedabad Collector, W.T. Doderot, “their labour was no longer useful to the mill and also they found the work becoming arduous”.\textsuperscript{57} In the 1940s, a 9-hour workday was introduced totalling 54 hours per week. Despite such

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, Part II, p.69.
\textsuperscript{54} Textile Labour Association, Ahmedbad, 1928, p.18.
\textsuperscript{55} S.D. Mehta, op.cit 1954, p.142.
\textsuperscript{56} Lakha, op.cit. p.94.
\textsuperscript{57} Indian Textile Journal, Nov. 1907, p.54.
laws, workers in the Bombay Presidency toiled for 10 hours a day, and 60 hours for the week.\textsuperscript{58}

The workers' condition worsened further due to high liquor consumption, especially among the lower caste and lowest paid workers, the \textit{Dheds, Vankars and Vaghris}.\textsuperscript{59} This was in response to the widespread social discrimination to which they were subjected. When Gandhiji settled down in Ahmedabad in 1915 and started a campaign against untouchability, the outside world came to know about their plight.

Nor did the low caste workers get any sympathy from the Government. Dismissing the need for education for the workers' children, Doderet, Ahmedabad Collector commented that he did not think that the class from which mill operatives came received education and there was no particular reason why mill owners should be forced to provide education. Also it was said that there seemed no point in giving an education to children who were going to work all their lives in a mill.\textsuperscript{60}

In the 1850s, Ahmedabad retained its essential medieval features – the old institution of Mahajans controlling trade, its streets were narrow and unpaved with wooden houses, goods transported by pack animals; the railway line from Bombay to Ahmedabad in 1864, breached this isolation.

\textbf{Colonial Interventions}

When the Raj established its presence in Ahmedabad, their own officers substituted the Maratha officials. The non-hereditary officers were discharged, though the holders of hereditary posts were confirmed. The British did not interfere with the existing allowances and pensions awarded

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Royal Commission}, 1931, Vo.1, Part I, p.59.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Textile Labour Association}, Ahmedabad, 1925, p.24.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Indian Textile Journal}, November 1907, p.54.
by the Mughals and Marathas, the non-hereditary allowances continued till the death of the recipient. The East India Company acted as the legal successor of these governments. The old Mughal and Maratha sanads (deeds of grant) produced before the British officials, and preserved in various files of the Bombay Government, show a respect for learning and holiness among the Hindus and Muslims.61

Gradually, a more formal structure apparatus came into place. Traditional usages and hereditary links were no longer given much importance. The private rights to dues on trade were commuted to fixed allowances. Attempts were made to abolish marphatias who were intermediaries between the merchants and the government in tax collection. Once the municipal act was introduced into Ahmedabad, all exceptions from town duties were abolished. The Nagarsheth complained that his dignity as an influential citizen was affected, as he no longer had the privilege of duty free imported goods for his own consumption.62 In its reply, the government stated that it’s derogatory for a wealthy citizen to seek to escape the payment of taxes, which are levied, from the poorer and less privileged members of the community.63 Similarly, the Municipal Commission resolved by 11 votes to 10 to allow no exemption to the Gosaijee Maharaj of the Vaishnavas and also the panjrapol (animal hospice) maintained by the Jains.64 Another resolution made very clear the government’s emphasis on merit. In 1864, it was decided to give preference to a candidate who had cleared the civil service examinations, when there were two candidates for employment.65

62 General Department, Vol.33, 1808, No. 86.
63 Municipal Proceedings, 2nd August 1858.
64 Ibid, November 1, 1858.
65 Ibid, 10 Feb. 1864.
Attempts were made to regulate the city space and to reorder it according to Victorian notions of order and neatness. Unlawful encroachments on public roadways and the violation of building codes were strictly penalized. The collection of town duties was further streamlined. At first, the fines were imposed by the Municipal Commissioner and later by a magistrate on the evidence of the municipal officers.  

Needless to say, such measures made the administration very unpopular. The people had protested against the house tax and taxes for improving and lighting roads and police posts. There were complaints that funds were used to repair and light the roads used by Europeans. On behalf of the people, the Nagarsheth forwarded a petition to the government. The government acknowledged such protests.

It was decided to light all the city roads. The suburbs of Hathipura, Rajpur and Madhavpura were relieved from municipal duties, as they had not received any benefits. The pay of gatekeepers was raised to make them less susceptible to bribery.

The understanding of local usages and customs depended on the sagacity of individual collectors and influenced their attempts at urban improvements. In 1869, the Collector, Mr. Borrodaile imposed the halalkhore cess for night soil removal from houses, usually the job of bhangis (sweepers). He was urged by the government to be discreet and cautious lest the people think such actions hostile.

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66 Collector to Bombay, 18th April 1850, General Department.
67 Petition, 25 September 1864, General Department.
69 Ibid. p.340.
70 Resolution 2476, General Department. Bombay Government. October 20, 1869.
The beautification zeal of the municipality intruded into the privacy of the people. And the people responded by yet another petition, containing 700 signatures, in 1813, protesting about the *halalkhore cess*, the neglect of roads of ordinary citizens and more attention paid to areas where the elites resided and that the authorities were neglecting the people’s interests.\(^{71}\)

The insensitive nature of reforms, which interfered with the people’s lives, was taken note of by the local associations. On behalf of the Bombay Association and the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, Nowrozee Furdoózee placed the Ahmedabadi grievances before the authorities.\(^{72}\)

Under the Bombay District Municipal Act (VI of 1873), the Ahmedabad Municipality was reconstituted into a ‘City Municipality’. However this change in nomenclature did not lead to any change in the municipal constitution; the election of non-official members was not permitted.\(^{73}\)

The local powerful sections were able to influence municipal decisions. In 1882, the Mahajan of Kapan petitioned against the highly discriminatory taxation system. Their duty paid imported cloth was mishandled at the gates, while the raw material of the big *sheths* was left untaxed.\(^{74}\) Similarly, the raw cotton brought in by the mill owners was left untouched while *octroi* was levied on butter.\(^{75}\)

Concerned citizens objected such partisan measures. Ranchodlal Chotalal wrote a note criticising the *octroi*, which burdened the poor.\(^{76}\)

\(^{71}\) Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, 1879, p.311.
\(^{72}\) Report of the Finance Committee, 1873, January, No.20.
\(^{73}\) Bombay Presidency, Administration Report, 1873-74, p.258.
\(^{74}\) Bombay Government, General Department. Petition, 26 July 1882.
\(^{75}\) Bombay Government, General Department, 1898, No.45.
\(^{76}\) Municipal Proceedings, June 24, 1882.
'Octroi' and port duties were imposed on English yarn and piece goods imported into the city. To maintain the police set-up, octroi was hiked. The official argument was that English cloth was a luxury and it is better to tax the poor than the rich.\(^77\)

The civic conditions of eighteenth century Ahmedabad had deteriorated. No regard was paid to any regular formation of streets, roads and thoroughfares. The living space was congested, houses built haphazardly without any interference of the city authorities of that time.\(^78\)

The situation grew worse in the nineteenth century as extra living space needed to be provided for the large caste communities, clustered together, instead of shifting to the less crowded parts of the city which would have been the natural response of a population not divided into castes.\(^79\)

New rules were enforced to relieve the congestion of the city-streets. It was necessary to get permission for new constructions, or else the municipal inspectors would demolish any structure, which protruded beyond the street or its roof projected within eight feet of each other across the street. The new administration was shedding its paternalistic colour and enforcing its vision of spacing the city. To widen the roads wherever necessary compulsory purchases were made of properties or of their parts in order to widen the streets. To determine the compensation, panchayats were appointed. But in the caste bound, spatially immobile communities of nineteenth century Ahmedabad such arbitrary measures were opposed.

The city survey began in 1863 by the Collector, Mr. T.C. Hope. Since 1824, there had been no surveys and private rights were ill defined.

\(^77\) Municipal Proceedings, 18 March 1871 and 29 November 1872.
\(^78\) Letter of Mahipatram Rupram. General Department. November 1886.
\(^79\) Ibid.
Also the land was rapidly rising in value. Usually, the Collector would auction off any unclaimed land and construction was carried out on vacant lots: such lands had dubious titles. The city survey hoped to curtail such encroachments and settle claims. However, the legality of the survey was questioned and the people refused to pay or accept the title deeds. The municipality and the government shared the expenses of the city survey; the latter received the sale proceeds of the right of occupancy of most of the land resumed. The chief portion of the sale proceeds were to be derived from the sale of sanads or title deeds, confirming holders in their possession and maps showing exactly the proper boundaries and limits of their property.

The Survey Officer had the requisite power to enter houses. People cooperated and it was laid down that no low paid subordinate should enter a house for the purposes of the survey, except with the consent of the owner; and that if he refused permission, the subordinate officer was to go to higher authorities and obtain instructions. In a thickly populated town, it was sometimes necessary to enter houses to obtain information. As a rule all the information that was needed could be obtained form the measurement of the compound.

The Municipality constructed several new roads to relieve congestion, to open up the polls, and connect the city centre directly with the railway station. The cost of acquiring properties was offset by the sale of lots fronting the new roads. For example, the Oliphant Road, from Ellisbridge to Astodia Gate, Richey Road, from city centre to the railway

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80 Correspondence Regarding City Surveys in Gujarat, 1868, Bombay, 1873, pp.127-143.
81 Ibid, p.145.
82 Ibid, p.146.
station (now the Gandhi road), the Jordan Road, terminated at the Premabhai Gate. The people disapproved of such measures.

The prominent social activist, Mahipatram Rupram noted, “our attempt to open up some quarters of the city by making new roads with a view to afford proper ventilation and lessen congestion, has resulted in increased over crowdedness in others, for the families whose houses were purchased, instead of buying building sites in the large open spaces within the city walls or in the suburbs outside, accommodated themselves in the other already densely, populated quarters.”

In 1879, there existed only fifty miles of thoroughfare in Ahmedabad, twenty metal laid and twenty-two kachha roads, being washed twice a day, by carts and water-carriers and buckets splashing from roadside channels. The narrow by lanes and pol streets were deplorably maintained. Such roads became sewers in the monsoon and dust traps in the summer sunlight and fresh air seldom penetrated the pols. The conditions would disgrace the most uncivilized hamlet in India. Though the Municipality began to metal the pol roads in 1886, it was a gradual process as road metal was scarce and expensive.

The British made attempts to improve the cityscape. From 1868, kerosene was used in place of oil lamps to light the main streets of the city. The lighting and watering of the roads, the scavenging and the collection of taxes were normally carried out by the commissions’ own employees. The Municipality had the authority to apply a portion, not exceeding 25 percent of their annual revenue to the construction and support of

83 Gillian op.cit. p.126.
84 Letter to the Managing Committee, General Department. Ahmedabad Municipality, Nov. 1886.
85 Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, 1879, p.313.
86 Collector, September 11, 1888. General Department, Ahmedabad Municipality.
dispensaries, hospitals and schools,\textsuperscript{87} and under the Public Works Act of 1871 they could borrow in order to carry out extensive works to improve the public health and convenience.\textsuperscript{88} The commission helped maintain English and vernacular schools from 1862. A full time health officer was employed from 1875. The Kankaria Lake and garden, first completed in 1451 was repaired in 1872. A public garden graced the city square in 1877. Restoration was carried out at the Rani Rupmati Mosque. The first and second Elisbridge (1870 and 1892) new gates into the city walls, municipal offices and a vegetable market were built. Dyeing, tanning, pottery and tile making were dubbed offensive and dangerous and polluting the city’s environs. “People engaged in these professions were provided land to work outside the city walls”.\textsuperscript{89} No one who knew what Ahmedabad was like, not many years ago, could be but struck with the radical improvement of later years.\textsuperscript{90}

**WATER SUPPLY AND DRAINAGE**

“The sine qua non of the city, as in one way or another of every human habitation, was the water supply. Whether for sustenance, sanitation, fire fighting or industrial use, water was the original public utility and historically, the first urban problem”.\textsuperscript{91}

During the Sultanate and Mughal days, Ahmedabad had well maintained wells, aqueducts and step wells, but gradually they fell into disrepair. Slowly, the only water source for the city was from wells, the river and household cisterns containing rainwater collected from the roofs. The first initiative for a streamlined water policy was taken when the

\textsuperscript{90} Comment of a Government Officer, *Municipality Report*, 1879-80, p.50.
leading citizens agreed, in 1845, to use funds from the Town Wall Fund for water to be brought to Manek Chowk. A piped supply was provisioned in 1849. In 1866, steam pumps were used to pump water from the river, into a 52 feet tower filtered through vegetable charcoal and gravel and distributed to private property. The unhygienic water supplies lead to the highest death rate in Western India – 45.76 per thousand. Mr. Borrodaile, the Collector tried to make the government aware of this fact. Even the Sanitary Commissioner to the Bombay Government confirmed this report.92

Col. Walter Ducat, consulting Sanitary Engineer to the Government of Bombay, after a systematic investigation, in 1885, found the pumped water unfit for potable use.93 The death rate had climbed up to 49.07 per thousand.94 The Sabarmati waters were used for drinking and also for tanning, washing, dyeing clothes, bathing animals and burning bodies. The filters were inadequate and drainage water seeped into the water supply leading to cholera outbreaks. Using well water was also no option since water from the cesspools contaminated the sub-soil.

The tankas, (cisterns) dating back to the Sultanate and Mughal era, supplied safe water. The tankas were carefully constructed brick reservoirs under the floor of a room or courtyard, lined with plaster and filled with rainwater by the pipes or channels from thereof. The roof was kept clean; the water from the part of the room where people walked about was never taken. The cisterns were kept closed to prevent the accidental flow of water and its mouth protruded above the floor level. Though some of the cisterns were cracked and contaminated, the water gave excellent results under

chemical analysis. The efficiency of these water sources is proof of the urban standards of old Ahmedabad before the decline of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.  

Another point of contention was the drainage and sewage disposal system. Ahmedabad had brick cesspools, *Khalkuwas*, products of a pre-scientific age. Usually, the cesspools were in the street close to the house and up to 25 feet deep. They took the sullage water from the houses and liquid from the household privies, which were cleaned daily by the *bhangis* (untouchable sweepers). The theory was that these liquids would then seep into the sub-soil water and be carried away, to the river and get mixed with the municipal water supply over the years, the subsoil got highly contaminated. The walls became damp and a foul smell emanated from the cesspools. Social taboos too prevented the proper use of the cesspools. The Jains were reluctant to use it as it generated insect life. Muslim homes had cesspools inside to safeguard the seclusion of women. Majority homes had not even this simple facility. Dirty water was simply collected at streets around courtyard of houses and thrown on the roads. The only drains in the city were the storm water gutters along the main roads.

Hence, for Ducat, the rising death rate in Ahmedabad was not a surprise (45.2 per thousand in 1880-84), far higher than Bombay or Calcutta, which had greater population density.

In his report, Ducat makes an impassioned plea:

"It must not be supposed that the mere total of deaths, represents all the suffering and privation, that the inhabitants of a city, undergo. It maybe taken as an average, that for each death that occurs, 12 persons suffer from a serious, but non-fatal illness; so that in Ahmedabad, not only did 6123

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95 op.cit., p.4-17.
97 Ducat, op.cit. p.22.
people die, but not less than 73476 persons were seriously sick during the year. Imagine what a tax, this represents on the labour and energy of the people. These 73476 ill persons may not all be adult workers, wood carriers, on spinners and weavers, but whether it's the adult man or women, earner of wages, who is prostrate and unable to get to work or whether it's the infant, that requires attention and occupies the time of the parent by nursing it, the result is much the same; work cannot be done, wages cannot be earned, and the indirect penalty thus exacted from the city by want of sanitation far exceeds any taxation, that a more enlightened Government would ever need to demand, for the most perfect sanitary works: and there still remained the weakness, the want of energy and the premature decay of the people, that the constant slow poisoning of bad sanitation inevitably begets.”

Proper water supply services to a city of 1,20,000 persons cannot be constructed without considerable outlay and schemes upon schemes were put forward, estimated to cost 4 to 5 lack rupees. Numerous plans and estimates were drawn up. To illustrate, on 6th February 1878, Mr. Borrodaile, the Collector and President of the Municipality in a letter to the Executive Engineer for Irrigation, described his proposals. “Thus we have therefore determined to obtain more powerful engines and pumps, to make larger storage tanks, and improve filtration and extend pipes to every part of the city. The proposed cost – Rs.72, 000/- and complete distribution may raise it to one lakh.” However, the scheme was oblivious of the fact that the pipes were only earthenware, quite unfit to stand the pressure of a great head, or a high velocity and not capable to supply the wants of even a small section of the city. The only way out was to get rid of the existing

98 Ibid. p.21.
99 Ibid. p.31.
pipes and lay new ones. This would lead to about 10 times the estimated expenditure.

Various other schemes were proposed. The Executive Engineer for Irrigation, Gujarat District, and Mr. Pottinger proposed in November 1878, to bring Sabarmati river water from a purer source above the city, down to the pumping station and rise there with existing pumps. However, the river was subject to dangerous floods and the riverbed changed constantly. Also, the pumping site was not suitable from the sanitary point of view. The cost of a new pipe service was exorbitant.\(^{100}\)

There are few subjects of common everyday interest to everyone, on which, more erroneous notions exist, than the amount of water consumed per head in any town. In the various schemes submitted for the supply of water to Ahmedabad, in one instance, only 5 gallons a head a day for the population, and in all others, 10 gallons a head, were proposed. Now, it must be remembered that the water supplied to a town is not merely used for dietetic purposes only; and such a supply, as 10 gallons a day, per head, would not suffice for any civilized city; much less for Ahmedabad, situated on a very dry soil, in a hot climate, where water is used more freely and more necessarily in road watering, where fires break out frequently and where, from the habits of the people, there will surely be, much avoidable waste, in any high pressure service.\(^{101}\)

**LOCAL INITIATIVES**

The task of improving the living conditions fell to a reconstituted Municipal Commission controlled by Ahmedabadis themselves. When in 1880, Lord Ripon adopted the principle that there should be expansion of

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\(^{100}\) Op.cit, pp.32-34, for more details refer pp. 35-41.

\(^{101}\) Ibid. p.50.
local self-government in India: the provincial governments were urged to have their local bodies popularly elected and given more autonomy, as an instrument of political and popular education. The Bombay Government was reluctant to withdraw official supervision totally, fearing retrogression in progressive matters like conservancy, female and lower caste education. On an experimental basis half the members of the City Municipalities – excluding the President were to be elected; the President was still to be nominated by government, but where possible, he was to be a private gentleman, and his executive power was to be extended to the general body. The Ahmedabad Municipality was relieved of the policing charges laid on it in 1871, and instead was to pay for the establishment and maintenance of the middle and primary school, though these were still to be supervised by the Education Department of the Bombay Government.\textsuperscript{102}

In 1883, March, the first elections were held in Ahmedabad, ward wise and not on the basis of caste. Four lawyers, 4 Indian officers of the Education Department, one merchant (all the Hindus/Jains) and 3 Parsis (two of them businessmen) were elected. The Muslims, the Patidars, and the Vaishnavas failed to return a single candidate. In the city’s first brush with modern politics, traditional clout had lost space. The usual complaint was that men of characters would not deign to canvass for votes. However, the Government used its power of nomination to appoint outstanding citizens and representative of minority communities to the Municipal Commission.\textsuperscript{103}

Ranchodlal Chotalal was appointed the first non-official Chairman of the Managing Committee, following his election to the new Municipal

\textsuperscript{102} Gillian, op.cit. p.134.
\textsuperscript{103} Municipal Proceedings, 10 July and 24 October, 1883.
Commission. The *Nagarsheth* of the city, Prembhai Hemabhai declined the offer due to old age.

The issues of bad sanitation and lack of drainage engaged Ranchodlal’s attention. In December 1883, he drafted a memorandum and circulated it among his colleagues in the municipal committee. He highlighted the primitive system of cesspools, and tried to educate the public by lectures and pamphlets regarding the evils of overcrowding. He agreed that both Government and the Municipality should formulate a programme of improvement of streets and check the further overcrowding of the urban area by refusing to sell unoccupied land within its limits for building purposes.\(^{104}\)

Official authorities welcomed Ranchodlal’s memorandum with well-deserved praise. “The memorandum” wrote the Sanitary Commissioner to the Bombay Government in May 1884, “is I think, a remarkable document for a native gentleman to have written, as it exhibits a breadth of view and a masterly appreciation of some of the main questions that affect the public health of that city.”\(^{105}\) The Army Sanitary Commission in London, to whom the memorandum had been sent in the form of an appendix to the Sanitary Commissioners Report, echoed similar sentiments.\(^{106}\)

Ranchodlal had a tough time convincing his colleagues on the Municipal Committee on the validity of his ideas. He devoted a considerable portion of the annual administrative report of the Municipality for 1883-84 to a detailed exposition of the urgent requirements of the city. He discussed about the primitive cesspits in the houses, the unsanitary condition of the *pols*, and the insufficient drainage.

\(^{104}\) Memorandum of 8 December 1883, *General Department. 104/1884.*


\(^{106}\) Ibid. p.29.
that led to cholera epidemics after every monsoon. He prepared an estimate of about 14 lakh rupees which would be required to improve matters and proposed that the Municipality could obtain a loan of this amount at five percent repayable in 50 years and a special tax amounting to about 12 annas per head, should be levied upon the city. Also, he requested the government to assist their endeavours by advancing the necessary loan at four percent, by conceding to the Municipality the right to receive the sale-proceeds of the occupancy rights to all unoccupied lands within municipal limits, and thirdly by paying the Municipality compensation for the loss of octroi fees on country liquor which had resulted (in 1881) from the government liquor monopoly and farming system.107

The implications of the water-works introduced by the colonial authorities were gradually becoming evident. It was an attempt to further extend government control over the everyday life of the town's inhabitants and over a vital economic resource for the sustenance of commercial activities. It centralized control in government hands in order to establish a more effective urban order. The cost of the entire restructuring had to be borne by the inhabitants. British engineers drew up the plans on European models, approved by the Imperial authorities. As far as the municipal boards were concerned, they were approached only when it came to the crucial issue of finance.

Not surprisingly, those who paid for such schemes were sceptical about its utility. Recognizing these financial constraints and the extent of taxation, the people opposed these measures.

The style and substance of the leadership patterns in Ahmedabad underwent a paradigm shift when the educated professionals started getting, involved in civic affairs. Lawyers, teachers, doctors and other professional could fashion their own responses to the ideas of local Self-Government. When Vallabhbhai Patel took charge of Ahmedabad Municipality, he strived to make the municipal system more accountable and fought the vested interests of the British municipal offices. Terms like swadeshi and ‘non-cooperation’ were symbols in the market place of ideas but Vallabhbhai tried to forge these weapons into formidable instruments of negotiation, vis-à-vis the Government.

The larger colonial system of which the municipality was a part, the legal framework of limits on the municipality and the civic context all constituted the environment in which the Municipal system had to operate. There were other built in constraints. The nominated members, small but comparatively cohesive bloc were a major constraint. Also, the political orientations of the citizens and the councillors in general to the Municipal System and issues of public concern were not such as that would help a public-spirited person to succeed.

Vallabhbhai’s first effective action was his tussle with Mr. Shillidy, the powerful British Municipal Commissioner of the ICS Cadre, who had statutory powers over the Municipality and was determined to evoke them. Shillidy lumped together articles in the municipal advertisements, while inviting tenders, with a view to benefiting persons of his choice, against the bonafide producers of those goods. He also used to give advertisements in a comparatively small paper like ‘Political Bhomiya’ instead of ‘Prajabandhu’, which was enjoying wide circulation. Bypassing the Municipality, he would communicate directly with the Government.

Criticising such a stand, Ramanbhai Nilkanth observed that the Municipal President should have been the channel of communication between the Municipal Commissioner and the Government, except in matters of routine administration. However, Shillidy ignored such adverse comments.

In the annals of Indian municipalities for the first time, a harsh resolution was placed before the local body, against a British officer of a Commissioner’s status. The pro-Government Councillors tried to scuttle it but Valabhbhai used his legal acumen to pass the resolution by a majority vote.

Further trouble arose when the Sanitary Committee of the municipality requested the Commissioner to cleanse the Shuskar tank near Kankaria. To this, Shillidy had given a discourteous reply. Though owned by the Municipality, a match manufacturer, F.F Munshi, a councilor used the tank, subscribing to the wishes of Commissioner Shillidy. The tank was a breeding ground of mosquitoes and emitted an abominable smell causing great annoyance to a large number of people. As a preventive measure against malarial outbreaks, the Municipal Health Officer, advised the Municipality to fill it up. Despite a clear court verdict in favour of the Municipality, Shillidy backed Munshi and questioned the Municipality’s right of ownership over the tank.

Vallabhbhai brought forward a vote of censure, and raised certain points such as, “The Shuskar tank is a public tank originally rested in Government and thereafter in the Ahmedabad Municipality by G.R.

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111 Ibid.
112 General Board Resolution, 18/12/1916.
113 Prajabanahu, 1/4/1917.
114 Ibid.
No. 7129 dated 7-9-1914". Then the whole legal procedural dispute between the claimant F.F. Munshi, and Vallabhbhai was referred to the Government. "The Commissioner committed gross negligence in case of such a tank covering a plot of land extending over 53,000 sq. yards and worth not less than Rupees one lakh. This land had immense potential as a building site in a fast expanding and highly congested city like Ahmedabad."

The wordings of Vallabhbhai’s above-mentioned resolution in those days were pretty strong against an influential high officer belonging to the ruling class. 

When Vallabhbhai pressed for Shillidy’s removal, the government could not defend his actions. Valabhbhai got the office converted into an Indian Municipal Chief Officer with lower grade. In those days, this was also in keeping with the administrative needs and financial capacity of the Ahmedabad city.

As Municipal Commissioner, Shillidy, allowed greater water supply to the cantonment inhabited by the British and wealthy Indians at low rates when the rest of the city did not get sufficient water. In the city there were certain areas on high plane where water could not be supplied. To discuss water scarcity, a large meeting under the chairmanship of Gandhiji was organised by the Gujarat Sabha in 1916 to press for the demands with regard to the water supply. Many ‘pols’ did not get water even on the

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115 General Record, I, 1917-18, pp. 76-82.  
116 Ibid.  
117 Pratibandhi, 17/6/1917.  
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ground floor. But, even then, roads were profusely watered during the winter, which led to considerable waste of water.\textsuperscript{119}

In spite of the opposition of some nominated members, Vallabhbhai passed a General Board Resolution, against the supply of water at concessional rates to the cantonment.\textsuperscript{120} Such discrimination, which smacked of colonial mentality and exploitation of the local system working with meagre resources, prevailed in other cities too.\textsuperscript{121}

The meeting passed a resolution\textsuperscript{122}, which was not welcomed by the Municipal Commissioner, Mr. Pratt, who had a verbal duel with the office bearers of the Gujarat Sabha. As chairman of the Sanitary Committee Vallabhbhai too pressed the Government for improving the water supply and criticised the efficiency of the Municipal Engineer.\textsuperscript{123}

After successfully challenging the bureaucrats and bringing them under the authority of the Municipality, Vallabhbhai concentrated on making the municipal administration efficient and effective. There were leading citizens as well as government officers who neglected to pay taxes for the amenities they enjoyed. He listed such people and institutions as defaulters and prepared a list of their unpaid arrears. But how to make the elites pay? E.g., one was a first class honorary magistrate and also a Municipal magistrate. A letter was sent to the District Magistrate listing the evidence and the flaunting of municipal regulations. He was degraded and a warrant was issued for tax evasion. The Municipality threatened to

\textsuperscript{119} Prajabanthu, 23/1/1916 and 2/6/1916.
\textsuperscript{120} The Times of India, 12/4/1918.
\textsuperscript{121} Jawaharlal Nehru, An Autobiography, Allahabad, pp.143-44 - The Camp Area of Allahabad.
\textsuperscript{122} For details refer, the Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.16, 1917-18, No.66, pp.143-44.
\textsuperscript{123} For details on Vallabhbhai's arguments see Devavrat Pathak and Pravin Sheth, Sardar Patel, From Civic to National Leadership, Ahmedabad, Navjeevan, 1980, pp.51-55.
cut of the water supply till he paid taxes. The threats worked and he paid up the arrears of taxes. Such bold measures impressed the people.\textsuperscript{124}

Even top government officers had neglected to pay taxes for 15 to 20 years. Their water supply was stopped and properties attached. Even those bureaucrats who were transferred were contacted and the government collected the dues from them.\textsuperscript{125}

During his tenure in the Municipality, Vallabhbhai attempted to enlarge the scope of the local body's welfare work. He tried to mould public opinion against the office of the Municipal Commissioner and to abolish the post.\textsuperscript{126}

He paid great attention to the construction and extension of the hospital buildings and dispensaries in the labour areas.\textsuperscript{127} He got the donation of a building for the Kalupur dispensary during his first term as the Chairman of the Sanitary Committee.\textsuperscript{128} Provision was made for free vaccination against influenza at dispensaries.\textsuperscript{129} Medicines made in India were made readily available in the dispensaries.\textsuperscript{130} He drew the Municipality's attention to the proper maintenance of the plague hospital, lunatic asylum and leper asylum.\textsuperscript{131} He urged the Municipal Commissioner to draw up a list of localities where water shortage was acute.\textsuperscript{132} It was decided to stop the modernization of certain roads till the water supply

\begin{footnotes}
\item[124] Mavlankar and Dalal, op.cit. p.166.
\item[126] Prajabandhu, 1/1/1918, 27/1/1918 and 12/5/1918.
\item[128] General Board Resolution, 23/7/1918.
\item[129] Navjeevan, 18/4/1920.
\item[131] Ibid. pp.28-29.
\item[132] Ibid. 1917-18, pp.27-28.
\end{footnotes}
problem was mitigated. The Sanitary Committee made an attempt to induce people to use water more economically.

**SOME OBSERVATIONS**

The backdrop to all the fervent activities in the arena of local self-government could be traced to fiscal pressures in the second half of the nineteenth century. The growing military costs placed new strains on the imperial budget. Also a variety of imperial interests groups pressurised the Government of India to increase its expenditures. Manchester's calls for the development of irrigation, roads and railways to stimulate trade, carried increasing weight, not only with officials directly under the industrialists' sway but also among those concerned with improving the imperial balance of payments. Military strategists pushed for better internal communications and an end to the unsanitary conditions that threatened the health of the Indian Army. At the same time, it was becoming clear that the Indian peasantry was unable to bear any greater burden. Increasingly, the civil administration turned to towns to pay the bills.

Thus, the official view of the role of cities underwent a slow transformation. Urban places were no longer just headquarters for revenue establishments or staging points in the export of agrarian produce; rather, they were to become a significant part of the taxation structures. Officials began to consider the application of Victorian notions of civic improvement to Indian towns. They urged the adoption of land surveys and bylaws to control unsanitary practices and to regulate the use of urban

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133 Ibid. pp.42-43.
134 Administration Report, 1919-20, p.28.
space. They formulated plans to improve urban health, the flow of commerce, police services and education. They thought of providing cities with roads and bridges, public parks and drainage systems, schools and libraries. All these schemes cost money and since the Raj was unwilling to strain its own budget further, it now sought funding from local sources. In most Indian cities, municipalities were established to develop civic services and to tax the citizenry.

The colonial authorities implemented the ideas for civic improvement. Initially, the city’s inhabitants had little interest in the services the civil administration deemed important. With time some local demand for primary schools, the construction and repair of roads, and flood protection did develop, but even then, many residents resented paying for projects that benefited neighbourhoods other than their own.  

Sanitary reforms, the most expensive of municipal efforts won little acceptance in the town. Few residents subscribed to the germ theory of disease causation, which was slowly gaining acceptance in England. Thus, there was little felt need for cleaner sources of water drainage, works and disinfection projects.

Efforts at progress posed many potential dangers to existing lifestyles. In an effort to construct a cleaner, less disorderly city, more acceptable to the Victorian mind, the state entered or threatened to enter wide areas of social life that had never before been its domain. The municipality began to enact bylaws, regulating construction; unsanitary conditions “offensive and dangerous trades”, and the use of land laws, which in theory applied to all, regardless of social rank. A land survey

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137 Rich residents of the city felt little need for an improved water supply, perhaps because they obtained water from tanks underneath their houses. So, few supported the development of a water supply for the poorer residents in outlying neighbourhoods.

fixing urban property rights defined large areas of the city as public space not to be used for private purposes. This distinction between public and private space was new for the people, who had generally built their shops and homes on whatever free land was available. Further, now the citizens had to be concerned with how they disposed of wastewater and garbage, since a violation of bylaws could land them in a municipal court, a potentially costly and embarrassing experience.¹³⁹

Ranchodlal Chotalal wrote: “The most important duty of the Municipality is to look after public health”.¹⁴⁰ He envisaged a plan to improve the water supply and drainage of the city, to raise loans for the purpose and to repay the loan by hiking taxes. Influential people protested – Mahipatram Rupram, Bechardas Ambaidas and others. Caste prejudices were also raised saying that Brahmins and Vaishnavas would not use the piped water supply. Since underground drainage was still in an experimental stage, there were few takers.¹⁴¹

The Municipality had to publish the Ahmedabad Municipal record, in English and Gujarati, (in a situation where the local press was against Ranchodlal) in order “to communicate Municipal information to the public and make them take interest in Municipal affairs, to counteract the effect of misrepresentation and prepare the people to approve the actions of the Municipality and to cooperate in carrying out sanitary reforms calculated to promote their health and comfort and lessen the causes of disease and deaths as far as our means and knowledge will permit”.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Opposition to City Surveys see Correspondence Regarding City Surveys in Gujarat, 1868, Bombay, 1873, pp.127-143.
¹⁴⁰ Memorandum, 8 Dec. 1883, General Department. 1884.
¹⁴¹ The details are given in the Municipal Proceedings, the Compilation – Water Works, General Department. 1887.
¹⁴² Ahmedabad Municipal Record, No.52, 1883.
The concentration of labour and industrial production in Ahmedabad led to a break from the medieval manner of city life. By negotiating with the colonial rulers on the difficult task of civic improvement, the native leaders derived valuable experiences in governance, thereby widening the public sphere in the city. (This aspect will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter.)

The urban land use patterns in Ahmedabad underwent changes. Urban topography is socially created. Geographical location and physical resources provide the ecological context of growth but the actual use of space is determined by economic and political considerations, as well as by values and customs. Britain's rapidly growing imperial interests in the nineteenth century required a tighter network of dominance and control over her distant colonies. Urban centres had to be developed and better integrated within the Empire. They were expected to facilitate the movement of capital and function as effective centres of political control. Within the growing capitalist world system with its spatial and politico-economic separation of metro pole and periphery, the colonial cities especially were to serve as intermediate sites or sub metro poles.

The colonial cities embodied the most highly evolved features of colonial rule. The ideological thrust of this urban transformation was directly linked to prevailing Victorian concerns with order, civil improvement and the extension of British hegemony; all of which required greater state intervention.

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