CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

SITUATING AHMEDABAD-1856-1919

For over two thousand years, Gujarat has been an important arena for trade and textile exports. The dominant commercial impulse promoted economic prosperity as well as a diversified culture, for trade contacts attracted people living outside the sub-continent- Arabs, Persians, Turks, Abyssinians and others.

Sultan Ahmed Shah founded the city of Ahmedabad in 1411 AD, near the site of the ancient centre of trade, Asawal. His Muzzaffarid dynasty established in 1405 AD, created an independent sultanate in Gujarat that positively fostered scholastic pursuits, foreign trade and contacts. The city remained under independent sultans until the time of Bahadur Shah (1526-1537), after which it came under the sway of the Mughals when Humayun (1530-1540) held it for a short period. In 1572, under Akbar’s reign it became a part of the Mughal Empire and the seat of the Mughal Viceroy of Gujarat. Ahmedabad prospered under the Mughals, but with the disintegration of the Empire in the eighteenth century, the city plunged into chaos. The local chiefs ruled it jointly with the Marathas from 1733-1753. In 1757, it came under the sole control of the Marathas, before the British annexed it in 1817.

It is essential to trace the references of Asawal before we begin the story of Ahmedabad. The old town of Asawal appears to have held an important place among the cities of North Gujarat up to the end of the first decade of the 15th century when Sultan Ahmed Shah built his new capital- Ahmedabad, in its immediate vicinity in 1411 AD. Gradually, Asawal was
absorbed into the new city. During the time of the Delhi Sultanate, 1304-1403, Asawal or Ashapalli was a military cantonment. When Allauddin Khalji defeated Karnadev II in 1297 and marched to Sorath from Anhilwand, he camped at Asawal, where he had to fight the Bhils. Even Ahmed Shah fought the Bhils before the city was set up. Asawal was also the junction of several important trade routes. The building of his new capital at such a strategic site indicates the Sultan’s awareness of the problems in reinforcing his authority in a new area, not fully subjugated. ¹

Arab and Persian writers have also made references to Asawal. The celebrated Al-Biruni (AD 970-1039) was the first of the Arab geographers to mention Asawal alongwith Cambay, Bharuch, Supara and Thana, all on the Western Coast and placed Asawal as two days journey from Cambay. ² The Moroccan geographer Al-Idrisi, at the end of the eleventh century referred to Asawal as populous, commercial, rich, industrious and producer of useful articles. He compared the place both in size and population with Dholka.³ Then in the fourteenth century, Historian Ziauddin Barani mentioned Asawal as the place where Sultan Mohammed-bin-Tughlak halted for a month during the monsoon, while in pursuit of the rebel Taghi in Gujarat.⁴ The fifteenth century text, Tarikh-I -Mohammed Shahi, referred to Asawal as the scene of political chaos during the early days of the Gujarat Sultanate.⁵ Also Firishta and the author of the Mirat-I Sikandari note that Sultan Ahmed Shah I founded his new capital in the vicinity of Asawal.⁶ While giving a report of Humayun’s invasion of Gujarat during the reign of Sultan Bahadur, the historian, Niz Ahmed

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³ Eliot and Downson, The History Of India As Told By Its Own Historians, vol I London 1867,pp 86-87.
observed that Mirza Akbari and his nobles left Ahmedabad and camped near Sarkhej.\textsuperscript{7} Possibly, Asawal was outside the city walls of Ahmedabad, to the south beyond the Jamalpur gate.\textsuperscript{8}

Due to political compulsions, the past few years have witnessed attempts to change the name of Ahmedabad into Karnavati, which supposedly existed in close proximity to Ahmedabad and Asawal. According to the annals of the Rajput period of Gujarat history, Ashapalli or Asawal was the headquarters of a Bhil principality in the time of Raja Karna Solanki (AD 1064-94). This ruler led an expedition against its chief, Asha Bhil who was defeated and slain, and in response to an omen from a local goddess, Kachharva, Karna built her a temple. He also allegedly founded a city called Karnavati, the situation of which has never been definitely ascertained.\textsuperscript{9}

There is an interesting popular anecdote to the founding of Ahmedabad. Ahmed Shah married the daughter of the Bhil King of Asawal. Once, the Sultan went for a hunt. Suddenly, a rabbit chased off the Sultan’s hunting dog. This led the Sultan to ponder that if the rabbits of the area were so bold, what to say of the inhabitants? The idea of building a city germinated in his mind. So, the popular myth goes “Jab Kutte pe sasa aaya, tab Ahmed Shah ne nagar basaya”, i.e., when the rabbit chased the dog, Ahmed Shah built the city.\textsuperscript{10}

Ahmedabad was fortunate to have chroniclers like Maganlal Vakhatchand and Ratnamanirao Bhimrao Jote, who wrote the city’s

\textsuperscript{7} Eliot, vol 4, p. 1898.
\textsuperscript{10} Maganlal Vakhatchand, Ahmedabad No Itihaas, Pub. Gujarat Vidhansabha, Ahmedabad, 1850, pp.7-8.
History – its social institutions, the quaint life of the ‘pols’, replete with local flavour, in the local language – Gujarati.

Ahmed Shah encouraged merchants, weavers, and skilled craftsmen to settle down in Ahmedabad and turn it into a flourishing commercial city. The following quotation proves the success of the Sultan’s efforts “Ahmedabad/Amadawar is a godly city and situated on a fair river enclosed with strong walls and fair gates with many beautiful turrets. The buildings comparable to any city in Asia and Africa, the streets larger and well paved, the trade great, the merchants rich, the artifices excellent for gold and silver”.11

The most prosperous port was Cambay. Apart from Gujarat, the goods for export from North and Central India would arrive at Cambay. Asawal was also on the highway, the trade routes connecting it to Patan and Modasa in the north and Kapadwanj in the east, the routes to the various parts of Gujarat also passed through Asawal. It was central to the roads going towards later, Cambay and Sorath. Asawal continued as a prosperous suburb of Ahmedabad, adjacent to the Jamalpur gate till the end of the 18th century.12

To lay the foundation of the Bhadra fort, it is said that the Sultan looked for four pious men, who had not missed for a single time a day’s namaz. The first was the Sultan himself, second, the famous saint of Sarkhej Ahmed Khattu Gajbaksh, third – Malik Ahmed and the fourth – Kazi Ahmed. In 1412, Ahmed Shah started work on the Jama Masjid. In between, the Bhadra Fort and the Jama Masjid, Ahmed Shah built three lofty gates. The open ground was used for polo games and military exercises. To the east of Jama Masjid, he built a number of residences for

the royal household, nearby was an open area – named *Manek Chowk*, around which markets grew and it is still the commercial hub of the city.\(^\text{13}\)

The descendents of Ahmed Shah added numerous edifices to the city – like palaces, mosques, lakes etc. The Mughals were also fascinated by the city, though Jahangir called it *Gardabad* or city of dust. Sickened by the hot climate, the emperor lamented that what did the city’s father find so beautiful at this site, that he built this city.\(^\text{14}\)

The new capital of Gujarat continued to grow steadily in size and population and the work of adorning it with architectural monuments worthy of its importance was carried out by the sultans and their noblemen.

**SOCIAL ECOLOGY AND LAND USE**

For centuries, Ahmedabad remained an irregular, semicircular city, defined by its fortified city walls. These walls had played a very important role in the city’s defence as well as in defining its form. The walled city of Ahmedabad was located on the east of river Sabarmati, in the Bhadra area, covering 5.92 sq.km.\(^\text{15}\) The city was planned according to the ancient Indo-Aryan tradition of a royal capital, typically medieval in character, in respect of a wall within a wall concept.

The architecture of Ahmedabad illustrates in a very interesting manner the result of the contact of Saracenic with Hindu forms. The vigorousness of Islam found itself confronted by strongly vital Jain types, and submitted to compromises in which the latter predominated. Even the mosques are Hindu or Jain in their details with a Saracenic arch thrown in

\(^{13}\text{R.B.Jote, op.cit., p.8.}\)
\(^{14}\text{Ibid. P.22.}\)
\(^{15}\text{The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol.V, New Delhi, p.105.}\)
occasionally not from any constructive want, but as a symbol of Islam. The exquisite open tracery of some of the window and screens supplies evidence of the wonderful plasticity of stone in Indian hands.  

“The Muhammadans”, says James Ferguson, ‘had here forced themselves upon the most civilized and the most essentially building race at that time in India; and the Chalukyas conquered their conquerors and forced them to adopt forms and ornaments which were superior to any the invaders knew or could have introduced. The result is a style, which combines all the elegance and finish of Jain or Chalukyan Art, with a certain largeness of conception, which the Hindu never quite attained but which is characteristic of the people who at this time were subjecting all India to their sway”.

During the reign of Mohammad Begada, well-developed group of neighbourhoods emerged besides a royal complex with fortification. Mohammad Begada assigned various areas beyond the city limits to the commanders for accommodating people. These puras were a kind of suburban settlements with their own dynamics of growth decay and regeneration. There were at least 143 such settlements in Ahmedabad region. This resulted in the development of several distinct localities in and around the city like Sarangpur, named after its founder – Malek Sarang; Dariapur, after Darikhana; Kalupur, after Kaluniyar and so forth.

Around the royal palace, residential quarters, segregated by caste functions and religions grew a number of localities known as Pols. A Pol is a kind of micro-neighbourhood, with compact house clusters and with dead-end streets forming a residential enclosure, which could be closed at

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16 Ibid. pp.107-08.
19 For the entire list of puras, see R.B. Jote, pp.178-212.
its entrance by gates. After the clashes of 1714, the people sought greater security in the pols. Each pol developed linearly along a narrow street with shopping areas abutting on the streets representing typical features of growth of settlement pattern within the walled city. The pols were self-sustained over a period of time, as each house had its own storage facilities for water and food grains.

Since the streets were not adapted to vehicular traffic and neither water pipes nor sewage drains needed to be provided for, the irregular streets provided secured open spaces in front of each medieval residential building. Some of the oldest Pols of the city are Muhurat-ni-Pol, Mandvi-ni-Pol Lakha Patel-ni-Pol. All of them are concentrated in the central part of the city.

The physical setting of the residential area was based on a complex street pattern. All major roads leading from the city gates to the citadel, which enclosed the Royal Palace, became the principle arteries for movement as well as commercial activities. The main bazaars of the city developed along these routes. Branching out from the main bazaar were other streets, which could be classified as secondary or tertiary. These sub-streets again had in turn number of smaller streets or khadkies branching form them. Broadly, one could consider the main street with its commanding area as a neighbourhood macro-level, the sub-streets in the commanding area as meso-neighbourhood and the smaller narrow streets/khadkies as micro neighbourhoods. The main street and some sub-streets were suited to the limited traffic of the late eighteenth – nineteenth century. The bazaars along these streets catered to the general commercial

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20 These contentious issues will be examined in detail in the following chapter.
needs of the people, eventually giving rise to specialized bazaars each dealing with single items, like jewellery, utensils, cloth, grains and spices, while the *khadkies* remained purely a residential unit. The streets were narrow, often marked by irregular turns, closures or open squares. These variations in streets pattern were planned to break the monotony to overcome the problems of light and ventilation, and to make the street visible from houses giving each street its own physiognomy.\(^{23}\)

Open spaces of irregular shape and unorganised spaces known as ‘*choktha*’ also had their own peculiar social functional in the city. The variety of spaces, in the sub-streets and *khadkies* served multi-purpose functions – a playground for children, places for social interaction etc.

Over a period of time, the class-based spatial division of the city, with selective movement of households in different areas has been strengthened. Literally, the Sabarmati River bisects the city into rich and poor sections. The bulk of the households in the east are economically weak, with scarce amenities and public utilities. The dwellings are indifferent to the elementary needs of hygiene. On the contrary, west Ahmedabad which houses a majority of the better off sections is well planned with all the civil amenities. The walled city, with a significant upper class homes is also undergoing changes as the residents move to the west side. Those who continue are probably those whose preference for low rents in the rent controlled property outweigh the status of a better house outside or those who lack an effective access to

institutional housing or finance. Another factor is also the idea of security, which is fostered among the co-religionists.

The rapid industrialization of the city and socio-political changes has drastically changed the morphology of Ahmedabad. The quaint lifestyle of the pols were transformed when the instruments of modernization — education, drainage, and water supply were introduced. By far, the most reprehensible development was the ghettoisation of specific areas. All these aspects are studied in the following pages.

**Trade and Commodity Production**

The prosperity of Ahmedabad, says a native proverb, hangs on three threads – silk, gold and cotton. The richness of colour and the variety of designs made Mandelso comment, “There is not in a manner any nation, nor any merchandise in al Asia which may not be had at Ahmedabath where particularly those are made abundance of silks and cotton stuffs. They also make their great quantities of gold and silver brocades. The best indigo in the world comes from a village called Chirchees (Sarkhej).”

From Ahmedabad, fine velvets, silks, gold, silver, brocade reached the Middle East and Europe, coarse brightly coloured Ahmedabad cotton was worn in East Africa and South East Asia. The indigo from Sarkhej, drugs like opium from Malwa, wheat from nearby villages were exported to other parts of India. In return, it would get quick silver, copper and rose water from Aden, horses from Arabia, gold, ivory, amber and wax from the African East Coast, areca, pepper and coconut from Malabar and Ceylon, sugar and muslin from Bengal, jewels and musk from Malacca.

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The trade in Cambay was controlled by the Hindu and Jain merchants as well as Muslims, both Gujarati and Arab, who had strong links with those in Ahmedabad.\[^{27}\]

The city received a major shock when the Gujarat Sultanate collapsed. There was also the simultaneous effect of Portuguese interference in the export trade. The establishment of the Mughal rule and the elimination of the internal transit duties encouraged trade. During the Mughal reign from 1572-1758, the population was reported to be 800,000 and the city yielded revenue of Rs.600,000, 12% of the total revenue of Gujarat.\[^{28}\]

Intense specialization and division of labour prevailed in textile production. The weaver did not produce the yarn. Yarn was purchased by the Englishmen in villages near Surat,\[^{29}\] Bharuch\[^{30}\] and Baroda,\[^{31}\] and Ahmedabad.\[^{32}\] Gradually, the isolationist and self-sufficient character of the village economy was changing and it was getting tied to the urban economy. Not far from Ahmedabad, the city of Mahmudabad produced enough yarn to supply entire Gujarat.\[^{33}\] There existed a professional class of spinners. There were particular castes skilled in preparing gold and silver threads and who sold them to weavers, who specialized in weaving cloths using such material.\[^{34}\] The weavers were so much dependent on the professional spinners for their supplies that when in 1630, the English purchased a large quantity of yarn at Bharuch, the weavers protested as it

\[^{27}\] Ibid. pp.41-42.
\[^{32}\] Foster, op.cit. 1624-29, p.239.
\[^{33}\] Thevenot and Careri, *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, New Delhi, 1949, p.46.
threatened their livelihood. A similar incident happened at Surat, when there was a protest by the weavers to protect their jobs.

Different craftsmen did the work of printing, dyeing and bleaching. Mahmudabad and Ahmedabad were famous for printed cloth. The Bhadsar caste was skilled in printing. The English shifted their purchase of printed cloths from Burhanpur to Ahmedabad.

For dyeing, the English sent textiles from Northern India to Ahmedabad. The English adopted an innovative procedure. To personally supervise the dyeing process, they purchased land in Ahmedabad and constructed 36 vats and paid wages to the local dyers who were hired. Unlike the royal Karkhanas, there was no compulsion on the craftsmen to take up the job. Thus, we find an important element of the capitalistic system of production – the presence of workmen, willing to exchange their skill for wages.

Ahmedabad, Surat, Bharuch and Bharoda were also famous for bleaching. Bharuch was more preferred as the special qualities of its waters made the cloths whiter. To earn profit, the Governor of Ahmedabad prohibited the craftsmen to use the river waters unless they paid him enhanced taxes. The Portuguese traveller, Barbosa, too noted

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35 Foster, op.cit. p.240
38 Gazettes of Bombay Presidency, op.cit. pp.177-78.
39 Foster, op.cit. 1742-45, p.167.
40 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
that bleaching was a very old profession, and observed the presence of Muslim washerwomen in Cambay at the beginning of the 16th Century.45

All these developments meant that tools for craftsmen were available, a market for such implements also thrived. An incident indirectly establishes the evidence of such a market at Ahmedabad. Raja Jai Singh, Amir of the Mughal Emperor Mohammad Shah, set up a new settlement of Jainagar. He promised the weavers of Ahmedabad lavish gifts to shift to the new town. However, the cloths produced did not match the quality of Ahmedabad's textiles. The weavers explained that this was probably due to the quality of tools, made from the Khirni tree. This made the Raja order several cart load of tools from Ahmedabad.46

Thus, textile production in Gujarat was characterized by growing specialization and division of labour, interdependence of villages and cities, presence of skilled craftsmen, ready to offer their services in lieu of wages. The export trade of Gujarat was not entirely oriented to luxury productions, though imports to Gujarat were usually so.47

Apart from textiles, Ahmedabad also played an important role in the food grains market in Gujarat and beyond the borders of the sub-continent to the markets of Persia and the Middle East. The commodities exported included sugar, gum, lac and green ginger.48

At the same time, Gujarat's concentration on the production of agricultural raw materials promoted the trade of some goods such as

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47 S. Gopal, *Commerce and Crafts in Gujarat, 16th -17th Centuries*, New Delhi, People's Publishing House, pp.175, 182, 209.
coconut, ghee, and spices from parts of western India. This internal exchange of agricultural products reflected a degree of regional specialization within agriculture in India. Further, the state encouraged the cultivation of crops offering substantial revenue, which resulted in increased production of cash crops, such as tobacco, consequently promoting commodity production in Indian agriculture.

Ahmedabad provided a livelihood to many people beyond the city limits. Its immediate hinterland supplied raw cotton and food, wood for houses, carts, and fuel. The Ahmedabad market in food grains was particularly important for the development of the fertile Kaira district and her tough and enterprising Lewa Patidar peasant proprietors. The agricultural areas around Ahmedabad also provided tax revenues for the support of the government.

The city and the countryside were closely inter-linked as noted above. The Banias of Ahmedabad played an important part in the process of converting the produce of the peasantry of the surrounding areas into tax-revenues. Some of those entitled to receive a share in the produce of the soil—the proprietors of talukdari villages—lived in the city. Many of the peasants were indebted to moneylenders and petty traders, who kept them in a state of interminable dependence, as they in turn borrowed from larger firms in the city. Some of the preliminary stages of silk manufacture was done in the adjacent villages and the Patidars, in their...
spare time traded silk clothes in the city. There was no mass market in the villages for the city goods as majority of the people wore coarse homespun cloth. But the richer people in the countryside sought the luxury articles made in Ahmedabad.

**The Mercantile Tradition**

The merchants of western India comprised three categories: the *bania* (generic caste name for Hindu merchants), the *shroff* and the *sahukar*. The *bania* was primarily involved in the sale and purchase of commodities either independently or acting as an agent for a foreign trading company such as the East India Company.

The second category of commercial men, the *shroff*, derived from the Arabic *Saraf*, is an Indian version of a banker. The authenticity of money was verified by the *sarafs*. In Mughal India, anybody could approach the mint to convert his or her bullion to specie. This made it necessary to ensure that the metallic value of the coin was correct. The Ahmedabad *sarafs* provided a 'token currency' to counteract a shortage of copper *dams* brought about by scarce supplies of copper in 1665-66. The *sarafs* also changed money, bought and sold coins for profit and dealt in insurance, acting as risk-takers or brokers. Finally, they provided bills of exchange (*hundi*), which made possible the secure transfers of money between different towns. The *hundis* serviced the purpose of remitting money as well as gaining credit for short periods. In Ahmedabad, there existed a well-established market for *hundis* wherein payment in the form of 'commercial paper' was frequent. Foreign bills of exchange were easily

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54 Ibid. p.7.
available in Ahmedabad, as early as 1638, as the traders had contacts as far as Constantinople.\textsuperscript{55}

The last group of commercial men comprised the \textit{Sahukar} or \textit{Mahajan} who satisfied the credit and banking requirements of traders, artisans and peasants. Through its local and international trading links, Gujarat was one of the most economically advanced regions of India when the European ships first arrived on India’s western shores. Trading and money lending were most advanced in Gujarat.\textsuperscript{56} The use of money in Guja’at’s ports was widespread, as is indicated in the sixteenth Century Portuguese account, which provided conversion rates of Gujarat coins into Goan ones.\textsuperscript{57}

As observed by Forbes, Ahmedabad’s prime administrative status implied that part of its population represented bureaucrats and the armed forces, which may have numbered between 50,000 and 100,000 people, including their dependents.\textsuperscript{58} This section of the population, largely Muslim, both of Indian and foreign origin, enjoyed social privileges in the city. While the Muslims manned the bulk of the administrative and bureaucratic apparatus, the mercantile and trading activity was dominated by the \textit{banias} though there were a large number of traders from among the various Islamic sects as well. The latter, together with their servants and their assistants, constituted the second stratum of Ahmedabad society, after the rulers and nobility. The largest category of Ahmedabad’s population consisted of weavers, bleachers, cloth dyers, and workers in gold and silver thread, jewellers, wood and metal workers who serviced the artisans. Additionally, there were a few Europeans who traded there on behalf of

\textsuperscript{55} Irfan Habib, \textit{The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707}, New York, 1969, p.73.
\textsuperscript{56} V. Pavlov, \textit{Indian Capitalist Class, A Historical Study}, PPH, New Delhi, 1964, p.11.
their respective companies as a significant trading centre, Ahmedabad also played host periodically to itinerant traders transporting various goods.\textsuperscript{59}

The indigenous merchants of Gujarat were socially heterogeneous, consisting of Sunni and Shia, Bohras, Khojas, Jains, Meshri and others. Islam came into Gujarat in the eight century. So, the Muslim trading communities were derived over time partly from migrants, partly from conversions of the local population to the various denominations and partly from inter marriage. The non-indigenous Muslim traders from the Middle East, Central Asia and the Turkish Empire also settled in Gujarat. Itinerant preachers from the Persian Gulf and southern Iran, locally known as ‘pirs’ did much from the eleventh century onwards, to spread Islam and also to synchronise with the bhakti tradition in Hinduism. An important line of ‘pirs’ beginning with Nuruddin or Nur Satgur spread the khoja faith in Gujarat.\textsuperscript{60} Originally from Yeman, the Bohras came after a schism in their Imamate and settled in Surat. This heterogeneity produced a pluralistic tradition in trade, though the business units were mainly family firms. Cooperation tended to flow largely along social lines, respecting social cleavages.

In trade, including sea trade, the Hindus and Jains were dominant. No caste restrictions curtailed their geographical mobility, involving overseas trade and travel. On the contrary, the weavers and merchants from Cassimbazaar in Bengal were subjected to such rituals.\textsuperscript{61} Unlike the orthodox Muslims, those belonging to the Vaishya caste were allowed to lend money on interest. In this respect, the Khojas and Bohras, also participated to a limited extent in banking circumventing Islamic

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. p.275.
\textsuperscript{60} R.E. Enthoven, The Tribes and Castes of Bombay, Vol.II, Bombay, 1922, pp.219-22.
prohibition on usury. The heterodox and somewhat Hindu syncretic character of the Khojas and Bohras was also reflected in their inheritance practices that avoided the property divisions of more orthodox Muslim communities. This aided their business, as there was not much large-scale division of properties.62

Besides the Banias and Muslims, the Nagar Brahmans also occupied an important place as sarafs in Gujarat. Literate in Persian, the language of administration and knowledge of Hindu business methods, civil law and scriptural procedures, they carried out administrative functions under the Sultans, Mughals and Marathas. With the growth of mercantile activity, they came to dominate the spheres of public accounts and finance and thus had an important position in the economy.63

In Gujarat, the guilds continued to flourish well into the nineteenth century. According to Jadunath Sarkar, Gujarat was the gateway of India, to the western world;64 its cities had become prominent centres of trade and commerce. The wealth and prosperity of its merchants had made them to organise themselves into powerful pressure groups, through guilds, which played an important role in the civil life of Gujarat.65

The system of caste or trade unions was more fully developed in Ahmedabad than in any other part of Gujarat. Each of the different castes of traders, manufacturers and artisans formed its own trade guild, to which all heads of household belonged. Every member had a right to vote and decisions were passed by a majority. In cases, where one industry had many branches, there were several guilds. The guilds of the makers of

63 M.N. Pearson, Traders and rulers of Gujarat, CUP, 1976, p.27.
64 M.R. Majumdar, Cultural History of Gujarat, From Early Times To Pre-British Period, Bombay, 1965, p.65.
65 Enthoven, op.cit., p.222.
bricks, tiles and of earthen jars were of trade purposes distinct. Similarly, in the weaving trade, those who prepared the different articles of silk and cotton formed distinct associations. The purpose of guilds was to regulate competition among the members, e.g. by prescribing days or hours during which work could not be done. Fines enforced the decisions of guilds. If the offender refused to pay and the guild members belong to one caste, the offender was excommunicated. If the guild members were of different castes, then the guild would influence other guilds so that the recalcitrant member did not get any work. If a person wanted to practice his craft, he had to pay a certain fee to the guild. This custom prevailed in the cloth and other trades but not among potters, carpenters etc. No such fee was required if a son succeeded his father, for the membership of the guild. The revenue derived from these fees and from fines was expended in feasts to members of the guild and for charity. Charitable institutions where beggars are fed daily were maintained in the city, at the expense of trade guilds. 66 This system prevailed till the modern mill industry emerged in the late nineteenth century, when philanthropy took different forms.

The Ahmedabad mill owners utilized traditional feature of caste, mahjan, hundi and sharafi; etc, the city had nurtured and developed these institutions over centuries. However, Ahmedabad had another unique feature – the institutions of Nagarsheth or chief merchant of the city. The development of ‘Nagarshethship’ in the city was an innovation in urban institutions.67

The commercial preponderance of the Bania groups was not a matter of timeless tradition, but a product of medieval migrations from Rajasthan to Gujarat. The Jain Oswal family of the Nagarsheths migrated

from Osian, near Jodhpur to Ahmedabad in the sixteenth century to take advantage of a secure Mughal rule in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The trade route from Osian, through Jodhpur, Palo, Sirohi and Palampur to Ahmedabad became more active due to the security offered by Akbar’s rule. The Gujarati Bania groups, both Vaishnava (Meshri) and Jain (Shravak) were mainly formed as a result of these medieval migrations from Rajasthan, between the tenth and sixteenth centuries. In Ahmedabad, it was the Jain Banias who came to predominate the city’s finance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The city’s bankers’ guild, which the Jain Nagarsheth family headed was the most organized bankers’ guild in India. The Ahmedabad shroffs had a system of clearing house among themselves, which had evolved much before the English clearing system was introduced in the country.

Being a principal merchant and the head of his own guild, coupled with his acceptance as the spokesman of the city, the Nagarsheth became an informal link between the city and the state at a time when representative urban institutions were yet to develop. The ruling authorities on state affairs frequently consulted the Nagarsheth and he conveyed to them people’s grievances. After the disturbances of 1713, Kapurchand Bhansali, led a delegation to Delhi to appraise the authorities of the matter. Another Nagarsheth, Nathusha, discussed the city’s future when Peshwa Raghoba occupied the city in 1753. Again in 1780, Nathusha persuaded General Goddard, the British General, not to loot the city. The Sheth candidly observed, that he and the merchants supported the earlier government because they could not in common honour act adverse to the

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71 Mirat-i-Ahmadi, op.cit. pp.358-59.
ruling authorities and by the same logic, they had come forward to pay their obeisance to the conqueror, not so much for themselves as for their fellow citizens.\textsuperscript{72}

The \textit{Nagarsheth} also performed several other roles. He used his influence to settle disputes between various guilds or individuals, helped the state authorities to raise funds in the city, and played some role in the collection of the town cess as indicated by the assignment of a part of the town duties to the \textit{Nagarsheth} family by all the \textit{Mahajans}. A Gujarati poem of 1725 indicates that probably he had access to the key of the city gates.\textsuperscript{73} Many a time he performed purely ritualistic acts – one \textit{Nagarsheth}, along with other citizens poured milk on the earth to propitiate the rain god when the monsoon failed.\textsuperscript{74}

The Marathas followed the Mughals in treating the \textit{Nagarsheth} with deference, after 1758, when they ruled over the city for around 60 years. In 1818, the British occupied the city and recognized the traditional privileges of the \textit{Nagarsheth} family. But the British made one change – they computed the \textit{Nagarsheth}'s share of the \textit{octroi} into an annual pension of a little more than Rs.2000.\textsuperscript{75} In turn, the British received the full support of Hemabhai and Premabhai.\textsuperscript{76}

British rule generated other changes too. Firstly, there was a gradual set up of more formal institutions like the municipal administration, from the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards. As the formal structure

\textsuperscript{73} Buddhiprakash, September 1876, pp.194-200. The poem, composed by Shamalji Bhatt in Samvat 1781 (1725 A.D.) notes that the Maratha invaders found the city gates closed on the orders of the provincial authorities. But Kushalchand opened the gates.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Gazetteer Of Bombay Presidency}, 1879, pp.113-14.
\textsuperscript{75} R.B. Jote, op.cit. p.739.
of the civic administration strengthened itself, the informal link between the city and state, symbolized by the *Nagarsheth*, became superfluous. The second development was the emergence of an industrial leadership in the latter half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, which subtly but effectively, challenged the trading and commercial groups represented by the *Nagarsheth*. Ranchodlal Chotalal, who set up the first textile mill in the city, was also the first president of Ahmedabad Municipality, enjoyed unrivalled position in business and civic circles.\textsuperscript{77} However, the title continued as a relic of the past, till the last holder died in 1977 and nobody could inherit it under the new government rules.

The *Nagarsheth* belonged to the Jain community. The cloth Mahajan had *Jains, Vaishnava Banias, Mashru Brahmins, Lohanas and Bhatias* as members. Banias dominated the shroffs but some were Nagar Brahmins too. The silk *Mashru Mahajan* contained both *Patidar* and *Bania* castes. Lohanas, Bhatias and Vaishnav Banias mostly ran the grain business. The Muslims and Hindus of the *Bhadsar* caste were good printers of cloth. The Sunni *Bohras* engaged in mercantile trade. The Mahajan of the paper industry was known as ‘*kagdi-ni-jamaat*’, mostly patronised by Muslims. The Kazi took care of the legal aspects of the Muslims.\textsuperscript{78}

The economic order evolved through three distinct phases. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Ahmedabad was a city of ‘*pedhis*’, a centre of flourishing indigenous banking and trading concerns. A group of big *shroffs* dominated the city’s commercial and financial activities. Handloom weaving constituted the manufacturing base for their widespread banking and trading operations. In the second phase, which extended roughly from the latter half of the nineteenth century to World

War Two, Ahmedabad was predominantly a city of textile mills. A group of cotton mill owners emerged through a process of ‘Manchesterisation’\(^{79}\) to dominate the new economic order of the city, but substantially they belonged to the same families, which had owned the city’s large ‘pedhis’ in the earlier phase. These ‘pedhis’ continued to play a major role in the growth of the mills. In the third phase, i.e. post-independence, the city’s manufacturing base extended to incorporate more sophisticated technology intensive industries such as dyestuffs, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and fertilizers. But the pioneers of the new chemical complexes were the same families, which had dominated/owned the largest groups of textile mills in the city.\(^{80}\) To illustrate, the Sarabhais and Lalbhais, Jain Banias, were prominent shroffs. They owned the largest group of textile mills in the city and after independence emerged as the pioneers of huge chemicals and pharmaceuticals complexes.

Hence, no wonder the British sought the cooperation of the rich and influential bankers like Nagarshetth Premabhai Himabhai, Kalamchand Premchand and Hathising Kesrising in governing the city. Also, the merchants were too pragmatic to ignore British overtures. The examples of Virji Vohra, Shantidas Jhaveri and the Travadis show that the Ahmedabadi and Surti merchants had left a legacy for their successors of getting along with the ruling masters. The people were eager to equip themselves with new skills to cope with changing circumstances. To illustrate, Sarabhai Munsaf (1793-1846) had acquired the working knowledge of English even before the establishment of British rule.


The familiar themes of Indian history found little paralleled with the trajectory of Ahmedabad’s history. The 1857 Revolt caused only a minor flutter in Ahmedabad. This city did not succumb to England’s *laissez faire*; it had no great intellectual renaissance, no dramatic swing towards the west, but rather a slow and selective adaptation. Neither the western educated middle class nor the comprador class were prominent here. Here, we find a survival and gradual transformation of an important tradition, leading to the growth of a modern industrial city, under the leaderships of an indigenous financial and mercantile elite.

Ahmedabad survived and progressed. This was quite significant considering the fact that the old, populous manufacturing towns, Dacca, Murshidabad, (which Clive had declared in 1857 to be as extensive, rich and populous as the city of London) Surat and the like were in a few years rendered desolate under Pax Britannica, with a completeness which ravages of the most destructive war or foreign conquest could have accomplished.

A British officer noted in 1830, ‘it is a common reproach against our government in this country, that towns fall off under us that Ahmedabad is a most gratifying example’. Unlike Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Kanpur, Ahmedabad was not a British creation, but a city, which, while remaining true to itself, successfully adapted to the new industrial skills and patterns of traditional social organisation.

According to a local proverb, Ahmedabad’s prosperity hung on three threads: gold, silver and cotton. All these were severed by British competition. It is a testimony to Ahmedabad’s resilience that it was later

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81 *Times of India*, 19th October, 1857.
able to adopt modern industrial technology and successfully fight Manchester with its own weapons.

**Studies on Ahmedabad**

Many studies have been done on the bold entrepreneurial and management skills of Ahmedabad. One of the more popular works is Gillian’s study which begins with old Ahmedabad, its guilds, residences, lifestyles, the trials and tribulation of the city under various chieftains to the corporate spirit of the pioneers of the cotton textile industry and finally a brief sketch of the Ahmedabad Municipality.

Focussing on the issue of labour politics, Sujata Patel took up the Textile Labour Association (TLA) popularly known as the Majoor Mahajan, started by Gandhiji in 1920. The stress is on the informal manner of dispute settlement by meetings between representatives of capital and labour, with the consent of members of both groups. The pattern of conflict resolution by consultation and/or arbitration is analysed against the background in which capital and labour organized themselves in the city and the manner in which they grow as classes. Gandhi’s role in institutionalising this arrangement is also discussed in detail.84

Salim Lakha focussed on the long-term social change in Gujarat, examines the transition from a pre-capitalist and pre-colonial mercantile city, to a colonial industrial centre. The account highlights the relatively autonomous character of capitalist character of capitalist development in Ahmedabad and its ramifications for capital – labour relations. By considering the social, organisational and

ideological forces influencing the interaction between the mill owners and the workers, the book provides a comprehensive analysis of class relations. The convergence of interests between the nationalist bourgeoisie and nationalist politicians, including Gandhi, had for reaching political consequence for the working class movement.85

Recent works on Ahmedabad focus on its inter community relationships and on the economic transformation of the city in an effort to cope with a rapidly globalizing world. Though directly not related to the period of study, nevertheless, these works provide valuable insights into the problems confronting the city.

Ahmedabad has witnessed the communalisation of its socio-political fabric in the past few decades. Ashutosh Varshney takes up this study and argues that in order to understand the presence of communal violence, it is important to understand its absence simultaneously. Thus, he takes three pairs of cities: Calicut and Aligarh, Lucknow and Hyderabad and Surat and Ahmedabad. Calicut, Lucknow and Surat have been traditionally riot free cities, while Aligarh, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad have been riot prone. The research is then a detailed investigation into why the three cities (i.e. Calicut, Lucknow and Surat) have been relatively peaceful and why the latter three cities (i.e. Aligarh, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad) witness periodic eruptions of violence. The importance of the research design lies in

studying the cities not individually but in pairs. His conclusions are simply stated. Cities are peaceful where there are civic institutions, alliances and networks that foster communal peace; where there is associational as opposed to merely everyday engagement between communities. Cities see violence where such institutions, alliances and networks have atrophied as in Ahmedabad. On Ahmedabad, Varshney points out that the decline of integrative institutions like the Textile Labour Association and the ascendancy of a political role over its civic role in the Congress Party is what has made Ahmedabad a hotbed for sectarian strife. 86

The book analyses how the city of Ahmedabad, which could cope with the crisis of deindustrialisation in the pre-independence period, thanks to the enterprising spirit of the people and flexibility in economic base is currently struggling to come to terms with globalisation. Uncertainty of employment has rendered the workforce vulnerable. Exclusive urban development processes are influencing the city’s spatial and economic dichotomy. Pressure from international agencies and scarce resources are adversely affecting the city’s capacity to deal with poverty. 87 However, local initiatives with community-based projects helped the city to cope with such problems. But such efforts are too fragmented and localized. Further, the communalisation of the city’s polity and shrinking of democratic space, especially for the vulnerable sections of the population have furthered eroded the city’s capability to deal with the crises.

Besides the works discussed above, numerous books and articles by Dwijendra Tripathi, Makrand Mehta, Shirin Mehta and Howard Spodek have commented on the entrepreneurial climate of Ahmedabad. However, the growth of self-governing institutions, under colonial guidance, which had far reaching implications on the town’s morphology, caste and communal relations, local politics, has not been discussed in much detail apart from stray references.

The Present Study

The cities and towns are places where economic social and political changes are the greatest. They are the locus of most of India’s high-caste, educational, professional and business elites and the physical base for its growing middle and industrial working classes. They are the centres of capital and wealth, technological change, communications, manufacturing and marketing. The strategic centrality of cities in the networks of communication and exchange confirms their function as headquarters for district and regional units of political parties and other political organizations. As growing competition makes the tasks of parties and organizations more crucial and complicated, the role of urban specialists in fund raising, accounting and publicity become indispensable, guaranteeing their continued access to decisions about recruitment, the selection of candidates for elective offices, and the formation of government ministries.

The Raj created a unique structure for running their Indian Empire. However much they might have relied on Indian collaborators, their government was organised to promote the power and profit for the imperial system throughout the world. The Indian Empire was ruled by a chain of command stretching from London to the districts and townships of India, so that even the pettiest official intervention in a locality issued from a
general authority. These administrative lines formed a grid, which at first rested loosely upon the base. Later the heavier intervention of the Raj in local matters and the growth of representative institutions pressed it more firmly. Indians needed to deal with the Raj and they did so by exploiting its structure and control and the forms in which its commands were cast. This called for a political structure of their own which should match the administrative and representative structure of the Raj whose function they were to take over in time.

It was in the administration of its localities that the vital intervention in ruling had to be made. Enlisting the cooperation of zamindars, mirasdars, talukdars and urban rais, the British struck a political bargain. Its terms were that they could depend on revenue collection, provided they did not ask to officiously who paid it and that they might take public order for granted, provided they unobtrusively enforced it. The British built the framework, the Indians fitted into it. Local bargains of this sort were of great use to the British as they reduced Indian politics to the level of haggles between the Raj and small pockets of its subjects, a system which kept them satisfactorily divided. In return, the British agreed to an arrangement where strong local intermediaries could block them from meddling in their affairs beyond a certain limit.

Lord Ripon pioneered local self Government in India. For him, it was the first step in the political education of Indians. These local institutions aided the Raj in its search for resources. The need for financial stringency burdened the new municipalities with police and conservancy charges. Also, they enabled the Raj to associate interests in the localities more widely and balance them more finely. It brought more Indians into consultation about the management of their affairs and kept them at work.
inside a framework, which safeguarded British interests. Representation became one of the vehicles for delving deeper into local society.

The problems of urban improvement were very complicated in Ahmedabad. The foreign rulers had to contend with differences in values and customs, which compounded the usual ignorance, prejudices and self-interests which urban improvers had to face. There were political compulsions also. The British Raj was an alien government, which was reluctant to impose heavy taxation to effect unwanted reforms. The task of municipal improvement became very difficult once it began to interfere with the people’s long-established habits and had to be accompanied by new forms of taxation. A complication was the introduction of more democratic forms of urban government in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The government of the city was transferred from the collector and the old urban elite with whom he cooperated, to a group of politicians drawn from new business and professional groups and dependent upon the electoral support of voters who were opposed to changes in their urban environment and to higher taxation.

The history of urban improvement in Ahmedabad falls naturally into two periods: first that from 1817 to 1883, when the city was ruled by collectors in cooperation with the members of the traditional financial and commercial elite. The second period from 1885 onwards, followed Lord Ripon’s Local Self-Government reforms. The Municipality was then more popularly constituted.
In the twentieth century, the mill-owners and other prominent people of Ahmedabad began to take an interest in wider national questions affecting their interests. Modern politics first developed within the new legal profession, which was to large extent composed of new comers to the city. In 1909, the Indian Councils Act introduced concept of communal representation, which became a cardinal problem and ground of controversy at every revision of the Indian electoral system.

This measure altered the subtle balance of power within the city politics, and the traditional elite found themselves confronting the new educated professionals with commitments to ethnic identities, to democracy and to nationalism.

The main factor conditioning the construction of political ideology and culture was the unequal power relationships between the colonial rulers and the colonized. Public culture was a product of British Rule and more importantly, of the efforts and struggles of local elites to create a place for themselves within the colonial order. Indigenous politicians shaped their values and self-images in reference to political languages derived from their ruler’s culture because these languages carried a special persuasive appeal in the context of British colonial domination, particularly in arenas of politics influenced by the new institutions of self-government. As local elites sought to influence their rulers and their relations with their political overlords, they took recourse to a vocabulary and symbols that had meaning to their rulers. In Ahmedabad, the political culture was transferred through the broadening scope of education, which enabled new professionals, as distinct from caste based elites to enter public life. To illustrate, the Gujarat Vernacular Society was set up in December 1848, which became the nucleus of social and educational reforms and was supported by donations from businessmen. The British
encouraged them to start newspapers and journals and to establish libraries, schools for boys and girls and hospitals. The Gujarat Vernacular Society started a weekly newspaper, ‘the Vartaman’ in 1849, and a journal ‘Buddhiprakash’ in 1850. They provided information on events in the United States and Western Europe. The Buddhiprakash reported many technical innovations like the electric telegraph. In a very real sense, the Buddhiprakash created the conditions for the appearance of the modern entrepreneur, it was instrumental in creating an information revolution in Ahmedabad and Gujarat. These changes affected Gujarati society and it experienced a qualitative transformation, which ushered in a new social structure based on achievement and legal rational norms.

Another organisation, which used the new representative institutions effectively and gave it a local colour, was the Gujarat Sabha set up in 1884. Its object was to place the grievances and difficulties of the public before the Government by means of petitions and representations. After Gandhi became active in Gujarat politics, he was nominated the President of the Sabha and Sardar Patel as the Secretary. It was decided to hold annual political conferences in different areas of Gujarat and at the first such conference at Godhra, Jinnah, Tilak and Vithalbhai Patel attended. The tone and tenor of the resolutions changed, reminiscent of later Congress dealings with the British.

Hence, in carving out niches for themselves within the Raj, competing with each other for power, striving for justice and even criticizing colonial rule, they developed commitments to political principles whose origin were ultimately alien. The principle of public representation and its seeming anti-thesis-communal representation, both became established through the same processes, that is, the efforts of local
leaders to interpret and reinterpret borrowed political conceptions in the everyday struggles of local politics.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Raj’s agenda for progress had made the position of the merchants and artisans insecure. Also, the municipality’s modernising efforts had put at risk the personal, familial and community concerns and the citizenry had to resort to innovative counter-hegemonic measures. One can discern two factors that conditioned the cultural and ideological adaptations of local groupings to British Rule. The mercantile groups were very precariously poised vis-à-vis the larger political framework. Their very existence depended on a secure political climate. For their survival, they had to build enduring, stable relationships with rulers who dispensed favours and controlled the use of force. To combat the alien dangers to indigenous livelihoods, they sought closer ties with the powers that be, than revolt. The only way the merchants of Ahmedabad could assume positions of power and a semblance of security was by creating deferential bonds that allowed them to establish moral claims to patronage and just treatment. Hence, this meant adjusting themselves to the political idiom of the ruling group. So, the willingness to work within a liberal representative system can be seen as a part of a continuing process of accommodation to the culture of the imperial rulers. By late nineteenth century, colonialism had penetrated into the Ahmedabadi’s everyday material and cultural life and a vulnerable people had to perforce work within the institutional and discursive constraints of state power, which further strengthened their traditional tendencies.

However, at another level, the colonial agenda of social progress was continuously challenged. To illustrate, tax evasion, non-observance of government regulations and encroachment on public space. But due to
their precarious political position, these protests never questioned the central symbols of authority or even the basic terms of political discourse in the civic arena.

The institutions of the Raj, schools, colleges, the courts, municipalities, legislative assemblies, all had a powerful socialising effect. These sites ensured the ascendancy of liberal concepts of political representation, the public good and progress in the sub-continent's central arena of politics.

This study seeks to demonstrate how political practice in and around the local institutions of self-government, contributed to the development of a local public culture. It was not simply the question of the Ahmedabadi's fitting into the institutional framework of the Raj. Within the constraints of a colonial system, they developed commitments to a liberal, representative order. The public discourse was revolving around modernity, representation and nationalism, appropriated and transformed to challenge British Rule itself.

The second chapter in this work, deals with the genesis of the Ahmedabad Municipality, the different bodies like the Town Wall Committee, the Gujarat Sabha etc. The resolutions of the local self-government, the response of the people and the entire edifice of the urban authority. The third chapter details the municipal activities- sewage, water supply, housing, public health and sanitation, education and taxation. One characteristic feature of housing in the city was "pols"; caste based localities. How did the modernising efforts of the municipality effect life in the "pols"? What was the response of the residents on the various town improving activities and the restructuring of public space. The emerging civic leadership and its social milieu is the focus of the fourth chapter. It is
divided into three sections, a) the traditional elite, till Ranchodlal Chotalal’s death in 1898, b) the educated professionals in the intermediate period, and c) the Gandhians, (whose influence began when Gandhiji started the Satyagraha Ashram near Sabarmati- May 25th, 1915.) This is best reflected when Vallabhbhai Patel got involved in Municipal activities and strived to get the maximum advantage for the citizens vis-à-vis the government. This chapter tries to explore the major actors in city politics, their goals and aspirations, their decision-making patterns and policy contents.

The city has been seen as an agent of social and cultural change. The close-knit family and group relations of traditional or rural society make way in the modern city to far more impersonal transitory and functionally specific relationships. Great size and population density, specialisation and differentiation of occupational roles, mobility and the complexity of urban transactions are supposed to foster new bases for intimacy and obligation, new forms of recruitment and performance and new opportunities for self-achievement. Urban living is thought to promote the replacement of primordial attachments to groups of blood and birth with functional and voluntary attachments to modern associations and organisations. Did caste and communal loyalties get intensified in Ahmedabad? The fifth and concluding chapter deals with inter personal relationships.

In the consolidation of political interests around communal issues, the imperial power played an important role. By treating the Muslims as a separate group, it divided them from other Indians. By granting them separate electorates, it institutionalised that division. This was one of the crucial factors in the development of communal politics. Muslim politicians did not have to appeal to non-Muslims; non-Muslims did not have to appeal to Muslims. This made it very difficult for a genuine Indian
Nationalism to emerge. The intricacies of the working of separate electorates quickened the pace of communalisation of the body politic. The peculiar morphology and housing pattern of Ahmedabad acerbated communal tensions, the battle lines being sharply drawn among different localities. Do the familiar reasons of Muslims lagging behind in Western education or job opportunities; provide clues to their being alienated in the city? How did the prosperous Muslim castes that engaged in business cope with new socio-political realities? The attempt will be to examine the different narratives regarding the violence in Ahmedabad and their impact on interpersonal relations till the present.