Chapter 4
Sociology of Caste, Untouchability and Reservations

In this chapter I discuss I. P. Desai’s contribution to the study of caste, untouchability and reservations. The chapter is divided into three parts. First, I discuss Desai’s contribution to the study of caste, second, his contribution to the study of untouchability in Gujarat, and third, his views about the policy of reservations in India.

Caste

Desai’s first writing on caste was “A Note on Change in the Caste System” (1954c, reprinted in 1981c). It was written jointly with Y.B. Damle and published in Ghurye Felicitation Volume, edited by K.M. Kapadia (1954). In this paper he examined whether there was any change in the caste system. He examined this question on the basis of Ghurye’s description of caste system given in 1932 and in 1955. Desai’s second writing on caste was his paper, “Caste and Politics” (1967a) in which he examined the relationship between caste and politics and questioned the general belief that caste influenced politics. His third writing on caste became his last publication in sociology. It was written jointly with A. M. Shah and published in 1988 after Desai’s death.

Change in Caste System

Caste is a hereditary social group, which has survived through ages (Ghurye 1961). Ghurye wrote about caste extensively in his first book, Caste and Race in India
from rural to urban areas mainly as industrial workers. In urban areas people of different castes worked together, started living together, and thus taboos against inter-dining (food-sharing) started weakening. Urbanization thus weakened the rules of commensality.

In 1947, India became independent. In addition to industrialization and urbanization, the other factors that affected the caste system include: abolition of princely states, enactment of several new laws, spread of education, socio-religious reform movements, westernization, growth of modern professions, spatial mobility, and growth of market economy. Social scientists in independent India often raised questions about the persistence of the caste system. Some expressed the view that the caste system was fast changing and weakening. Some others expressed the view that the caste system was not changing fast and that the changes were gradual. Scholars like G. S. Ghurye (1952), I. P. Desai and Damle (1954a), M. N. Srinivas, A. M. Shah (Shah and Desai: 1988), supported the latter view. In 1950, Ghurye wrote that caste was as strong as before, “Its vitality in social life is as strong as ever” (1952).

Thus, in modern India the scholars continued to ask questions about the future of caste system. Desai was also concerned about changes in caste. He wrote with Damle a note on change in the caste system in 1954. They resented the popular opinions about change in caste in modern India. They felt that these opinions were based on inadequate and partially observed data. Therefore, they said that it was necessary to assess changes in caste on the basis of facts, in order to guide the elites to form appropriate social policies, and the Government to judge whether what it desired was possible to achieve or not (e.g., Sarada Act).
According to Desai, Ghurye’s writings showed deep insight into the problem of caste, but they were not based on any fieldwork or statistical data. Ghurye described changes in the caste system from the 19th century to 1950 in a historical perspective, without conducting any empirical study. He found the same features of caste in 1952 as in 1932. According to Desai, “The situation in 1950 can be summarized thus: caste remains a segmental division of society, with a strong endogamous sentiment. The three other features, viz., (1) restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, (2) civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections, and (3) lack of choice of occupations, have undergone great change” (1954c: 268). He discussed these features separately on the basis of observations made by Ghurye and Gardner Murphy (1953). Desai raised two questions: (1) how far these features had really disappeared, and (2) what was its effect on the caste system as a whole. Both Ghurye and Murphy reported disappearance of these features. Regarding restrictions on feeding and social intercourse and the recognition of privileges of higher castes (e.g., Brahmins), it was observed that in big cities like Bombay these features had completely disappeared among the people of higher castes in their behaviour outside their homes. However, they had not disappeared to the same degree among the people of lower caste. In smaller cities and towns the old rules prevailed to a greater degree. Therefore, Desai (Desai and Damle 1954c: 269) said that even in cities the disappearance of these features differed according to the strata of population. In rural areas the higher castes were unable to maintain their privileges compared to the past, and the restrictions on social intercourse were not the same as they were in the past. But, in Desai’s view, this need not be interpreted as widening of social intercourse between higher and lower castes. Thus, he said that apparently the higher
castes had widened social intercourse with the lower castes due to their inability to maintain the old position, but they were not guided by any ideology. So, it might revert to the original position or take a new form. Moreover, hierarchy still persisted in the caste system. Many castes were trying to improve their social status. According to Desai, this was an assertion and not negation of hierarchy.

A section of the advanced castes were denouncing the caste system. They were already in a better position, and caste ideology could not help them to maintain their position any longer. Therefore, they supported progressive ideology and said that an individual’s position might be decided on the basis of merit and not caste. But the interests of the advanced castes and non-advanced castes did not coincide and thus the liberal ideology could not become the ideology of the whole society. The freedom of choice of occupation did not change the position of lower castes. The higher castes were engaged in occupations requiring skill and education. Moreover, in future also the lower income class within higher castes might compete for skilled jobs with lower castes. This might further bring down the lower castes.

Some people thought that the weakening of caste panchayats would affect the caste and they might become loose groups. Contrary to this expectation, caste panchayats had undertaken new functions in the fields of education, housing, finance, medical aid, and recreation, and therefore people saw it as a helpful body. Thus caste panchayat was transformed into caste association and continued to be a binding force in a different manner. Desai further pointed out that even inter-caste marriages, urbanization and education had failed to change the caste system.
Irrespective of the degree of change in these features, what was more important to Desai (Desai and Damle: 1954c) was that these changes did not affect the caste system as a whole. Caste continued to exist as a segmental division of society that was endogamous and hierarchical, because the changes were not guided by any ideology and so it had failed to affect the whole system. The history of caste system suggests that various factors (economic, political, and religious) influenced the system from time to time, but the system showed resilience to them. Thus Desai and Damle pointed out that there were changes in parts of caste system but they had not affected the whole system. The magnitude of the changes was not as great as believed to be.

In modern times, caste was assumed to be influenced by western society and so was assumed to be changing in that direction. But no change was evident in the caste system, because it was one of the psychological possessions of the people. Desai distinguished traditional psychological possessions from modern psychological possessions. The traditional possessions were based on belief in shastras and darshanas whereas the modern possessions would be based on the beliefs of rational society. Now, the question was: could these traditional psychological possessions be replaced by modern psychological possessions (i.e., belief in rational society)? Desai believed that this change in consciousness was possible if the norm-setting group supported the belief of rational society. The norm-setting group consisted of the upper castes, and among them, the educated managerial class and technocrats who could make new beliefs effective. But, Desai argued, it had to be an occupational group with rationalist ideology and not a caste.
Desai examined the relationship between caste and politics in a paper in 1970 (1970c reprinted 1981c). This was a review article of a book edited by Rajni Kothari (1970). He argued with detailed description against the view that caste affects politics. He discussed the complexity of relationship between the two. He considered caste both as a single caste and as a system of social stratification. He distinguished caste solidarity from interest group solidarity (or interest conscious unity). He clarified what he meant by politics. Politics referred to the system of distribution power and the various organs of authority such as government and political parties.

There was a general view that caste affects politics. Desai asked: how does caste affect politics, and where such behaviour could be observed? When the political behaviour of the members of political parties and the government reflect caste considerations, it could be taken as an example of the influence of caste on politics. There was also a reverse belief that politics affects caste, which meant politics affects caste solidarity and hierarchy.

Desai gave the following examples to describe the effect of caste on political behaviour of people: (1) people of a caste vote en bloc for a candidate of the same or different caste, or they prefer a candidate who belonged to their caste only, apart from his merits or demerits, and (2) a candidate was selected on the basis of caste to which he belonged, in order to get support form his caste. The caste of the selectors played an important role while recommending the names of candidates for election. Thus, selectors, voters and candidates form alliances on the basis of caste. The office-bearers of a
political party were also appointed on the basis of caste to please one or other caste group. Sometimes ministers were appointed on the basis of caste, and ministers also made appointments on the basis of caste considerations. These examples describe the influence of caste on political behaviour of people.

Sometimes the members of a caste decided to vote for a candidate on the basis of his caste, i.e., on the basis of their ascribed qualities rather than achieved qualities (e.g., a Bania knows better accounting as a Bania and not because he was educated). Thus, voters' behaviour was influenced by caste, which supported the view that caste influences politics. But contrary evidence was also available, which suggested that caste did not influence politics.

Many caste groups demand tickets for their own candidates in the elections to have their representation in the government. This suggests that every caste believed that it could participate in the political system irrespective of its position in the caste system. This indicated caste solidarity. Caste often changed its political alliance. It was observed that in one election it supported one political party and in another election another political party. Candidates from the same caste could also demand tickets from two different political parties. In this case, caste votes were likely to be divided. There were instances of two candidates from the same caste fighting election in the same constituency or in different constituencies on the tickets of different political parties. In this case also caste votes were likely to be divided. This behaviour, according to Desai, was not based on caste interest.
On the basis of these examples, Desai said that the prevalent view of caste influencing politics needed further scrutiny. The contrary evidences created a doubt whether caste was always homogeneous in its political behaviour, and whether the members of a caste behaved always uniformly. In case of certain castes, their position in the old stratification system coincided with their position in the new stratification system. This happened when the higher castes occupied higher and lucrative positions in the new occupational structure. In such cases it was difficult to decide whether the uniformity of their political behaviour was due to unity of caste or unity of interests. According to Desai, each such case and situation needed to be analyzed to find out which unity was operative.

In these situations the old and the new positions did not coincide. Such situations were found in the case of Banias and Patidars in all parts of Gujarat. For example, the wealthy sections among the Banias were controlling industry and trade. Then Patidars entered trade and industry and also continued their interest in agriculture. In the secular field they were equal to Banias in terms of wealth, education, and occupation, but in ritual hierarchy they were lower than the Banias. The Patidars were numerically stronger and held positions of power in the political system. Was this the result of their caste solidarity or their position in the secular fields? It was argued that their position in the political system was due to their caste solidarity. But in the political field they were divided between Congress and Swatantra party in all parts of Gujarat. The Kshatriyas in Kheda District and the Kolis and Ahirs in Saurashtra were distributed politically into different political parties according to their economic and occupational interests. This undermined caste solidarity.
In urban areas, caste solidarity disappeared where caste was spatially dispersed. In rural areas, members of a caste in a village might vote for a different caste candidate, or the members of same caste might vote for the same candidate in different villages. Desai asked: did this reflect caste solidarity or village solidarity? The members of the same caste also voted for the same candidate in different villages (1981:124-125).

Desai pointed out that the political behaviour of the industrial working class and of white-collar employees was more oriented to their occupational interest than to their caste interests. He questioned the view that caste influences politics, by citing examples where caste did not influence political behavior. He wanted to point out that two types of relationships were found between caste and politics in Indian society: (1) there were instances where caste influenced politics, and (2) there were also instances where caste did not influence politics. Similarly, there were instances where politics influenced caste, and there were also instances where politics did not influence caste. It is necessary to consider these facts while analyzing the relationship between caste and politics. He also suggested that the political divisions in a caste should be examined, considering their economic, educational, and occupational characteristics. He further emphasized the study of individual castes, to explain the uniformity or the differences in political behaviour of the members of a caste, as well as to analyse the relationship between caste and politics. Any analysis of caste should take into consideration the socio-economic differences among the members of a caste as well as socio-economic conditions in different regions.
Division and Hierarchy

The book, *Division and Hierarch: An Overview of Caste in Gujarat*, written jointly by Desai and A. M. Shah, was Desai's last writing on caste. It was published in 1988, three years after his death. The book consisted of three chapters, with a Foreword by M.N. Srinivas and Preface by A.M. Shah. This book is unlike other normal books. It is in the form of a discussion that took place between Shah and Desai. Shah wrote a paper, "Division and Hierarch: An Overview of Caste in Gujarat" (1982). Desai found it a very stimulating paper and reacted to it in his letter to Shah, in which he raised many issues and expressed his disagreement on some of Shah's views. They then decided to meet personally and discuss the issues and differences between them. They met several times and decided to publish their discussion in the form of a book. The book consisted of three chapters. The first chapter was the reprint of Shah's paper, the second was Desai's critique, and the third was Shah's response to Desai's critique. Srinivas wrote in his Foreword, "This book is a well-deserved tribute to I.P. Desai the teacher, scholar, controversialist and friend from a former student and colleague."

Shah's paper focused on the traditional caste structure of Gujarat and changes in it in the modern period. He described traditional caste structure in terms of divisions of different orders and discussed caste divisions as horizontal units. His emphasis was on the analysis of two principles of caste system, namely, division and hierarchy. He explained these two principles with the help of endogamy and hypergamy. Srinivas wrote about Shah's essay in his Foreword, "Shah's essay is an important one, throwing light on
the caste system of Gujarat, on caste in general, and on hypergamy. Shah’s account of hypergamy in Gujarat, though brief, is one of the best I have come across.”

Shah has described the practice of hypergamy among the Rajputs, Anavil Brahmins of South Gujarat, and Leva Patidars and Khedawal Brahmins of Central Gujarat. The Rajputs were one of the divisions of the first order, not having further divisions. They had highly differentiated internal hierarchy and practiced hypergamy as an accepted norm. The Rajput hierarchy had many levels; at the top were the royal families of the large and powerful kingdoms, ruling lineages of the smaller and less powerful kingdoms, lineages of owners of large and small “fiefs”, lineages of substantial landowners under various land tenures having special rights and privileges, and lineages of small land owners. The highest stratum practiced polygyny and female infanticide to maintain its position. Kolis were the largest first order division with many second order divisions. Among Rajputs, the lower level Rajputs accepted Koli girls from well-off Koli chieftain families and then, on the basis of their kinship relations, passed off the Koli family as Rajputs. The Koli chieftain families accepted Koli girls from less wealthy Koli families. The Anavil Brahmins from South Gujarat, Leva Kanbis, and Khedawal Brahmins in Central Gujarat also practiced hypergamy and also attempted to organize into small endogamous units (ekadas, gols, bandhos) from time to time. But the hypergamous tendency was so powerful that each endogamous unit could not be perfectly endogamous. Each unit was ranked in relation to others, and many members of lower units married their daughters into higher units, so that every unit became loose in course of time. Thus, there was a continuous process of formation and disintegration of such units.
Thus, at one end of the continuum of castes in Gujarat there was emphasis on hierarchy and at the other end of the continuum there was emphasis on division as the principle of caste system. Vanias were at the other end of the continuum. They were mainly urban castes. They maintained some features of hypergamy. For example, Vanias living in villages gave their daughters in marriage to Vanias living in cities who were considered to be higher. But, Vanias mainly followed the principle of division. Vanias were divided into smaller endogamous units at various levels but there was no hierarchy among these units. Prohibition on commensality was absent between these units, and inter-marriages between sub-units were possible by paying some fine to their endogamous unit. Shah pointed out an important feature of traditional caste system in Gujarat, viz., that the caste that followed hypergamy tended to be very large in size and its population was dispersed over a wide area.

Shah described the other principle of traditional caste structure in Gujarat, namely, division. The traditional caste structure was divided into caste divisions of different orders. There were about 300 first order divisions, which were further divided into a number of second order divisions. The total number of second order divisions differed from one first order division to another first order division. Rajputs were not divided into second order divisions at all. All second order divisions of Brahmins and Vanias were further divided into third order divisions called ekadas, and some of them were further divided into fourth order divisions called tads. Often a division among Vanias corresponded to a division among Brahmans. For example, there were Modh Vanias and Modh Brahmans, Khadayata Vanias and Khadayata Brahmans, Shrimali Vanias and Shrimali Brahmans, Nagar Vanias and Nagar Brahmans, etc. However, all
Brahmin divisions did not have a corresponding Vania division. For example, there are Khedawal Brahmins but no Khedawal Vanias, and Lad Vanias but no Lad Brahmins. Moreover, whenever a Brahmin division corresponded with a Vania division, it generally worked as priests for the corresponding Vania division but not necessarily so. Kolis were divided into second order divisions of Talpada, Pardeshi, Palia, Baria etc.

While talking about changes in modern India, Shah pointed out that mainly the urban castes and the urban sections of the rural-cum-urban castes were first to take advantage of the new opportunities that developed in industry, commerce, administration, the professions and education in urban centers. Early industrial labour was also drawn from mainly the urban artisan and servant castes.

Two important changes observed by Shah in caste in modern Gujarat was the increasing number of inter-divisional or so-called inter-caste marriages and the emergence of caste associations in urban areas. Inter-caste marriages were violation of the rule of caste endogamy. The degree of violation in inter-caste or inter-divisional marriage depended on the order of division. Degree of violation was considered less if the couple belonged to two different 4th order divisions within a third order division than if they belonged to two different third order divisions within a second order division, and so on. The degree of violation was highest if the couple belonged to two first order divisions. Most inter-divisional marriages took place between the members of divisions of the lowest order in the structure of caste divisions. More of such marriages took place between divisions of 4th, 3rd and 2nd order among Vanias. However, majority of marriages took place within the respective divisions. Finally, more number of marriages has been
taking place recently across the boundaries of first order division, for example, between Brahmin and Vania, and Vania and Patidar, but such marriages form an extremely small proportion of the total number of marriages. Among caste divisions that practiced hypergamy (Rajputs and Patidars), Shah observed that a new hierarchy was replacing the traditional one.

Thus, the so-called inter-caste marriage was actually restricted, modified and graded according to the traditional structure of caste divisions. Shah linked the idea of inter-caste marriages with the idea of creating a casteless society. In case of inter-caste marriages, the barriers of the lowest order divisions are removed and gradually will remove the barriers of the higher order divisions. This, according to Shah, is similar to the process observed and pointed out by Ghurye long ago, “Slow consolidation of the smaller castes into larger ones would lead to three or four large groups being solidly organized for pushing the interests of each even at the cost of the others” (1932: 184).

Another change in caste in modern Gujarat was the emergence of caste associations. Gujarat (along with Mumbai) perhaps had the largest number of caste associations and they were also more active and wealthy compared to other regions. Caste associations have been formed on the lines of caste divisions. There are associations for divisions of all the orders in caste. For example, among the Khadayata Vanias there are all Khadayata associations as well as associations of various ekadas and sometimes even for their tads. Moreover, they may be single purpose or multi-purpose.
Castes having continuous internal hierarchy and lacking endogamous units (such as Rajputs, Leva Kanbis, Khedawals, and Anavils) did not have active associations for lower order divisions. Caste associations in Gujarat were formed mainly among upper castes to provide welfare and recreation, to promote modern education, and to bring about reforms in caste customs. Most associations retained their non-political character. Until 1947, no caste association in Gujarat had manifest political functions.

The most important example of primarily political caste associations was Gujarat Kshtriya Sabha (Shah, Ghanshyam 1975). It reflected, on the one hand, the political aspirations of Kolis based on their numerical strength, and on the other hand the Rajputs' attempt to regain power after loss of their princely states and estates. It has been experiencing stresses and strains and has had ups and downs on account of diversity between the royal and the tribal ends, and yet has shown remarkable solidarity in recent years.

The patterns of change in marriages and in caste associations indicate the growing importance of the principle of division in caste in Gujarat. At the same time, there was decline in the strength of the principle of hierarchy, particularly the ritual hierarchy expressed in terms of purity and pollution. The rules of commensality have greatly declined in urban as well as rural areas. Thus there was a change from emphasis on hierarchy to emphasis on division.

Desai criticised some of these views of Shah. He was a member of the second Socially and Educationally Backward Class Commission appointed by the Government of Gujarat (popularly known as Rane Commission). As a member of this commission he
visited many towns (at district headquarters and taluka headquarters) in Gujarat. During his visits to these towns he met representatives of 225 castes and Jamats who wanted to be included in Socially and Educationally Backward Class. On the basis of this information he chose to enter into public dialogue with Shah and criticized some of his views.

Desai appreciated that Shah recognised the need for studying caste in urban areas using different methods of research (other than fieldwork method). But he also pointed out that Shah did not specify what methods would be used to study caste in urban areas. Shah expressed that the study of caste in urban areas was neglected. Scholars studied caste in rural areas and therefore there was more emphasis on the principle of hierarchy in caste. Thus there was an incomplete picture of caste given by scholars, with emphasis on hierarchy as the main principle. For example, Dumont emphasised the hierarchical aspect of caste. As pointed out by Shah, “One of the reasons behind underplaying the principle of division, by Dumont as well as by others, seems to be the neglect of the study of caste in urban areas” (1988: 3). Desai appreciated that Shah pointed out a very important flaw in the study of caste in India. However, both Shah and Desai agreed on a point that, probably, Dumont was looking for a universal rule without exceptions and, therefore, he confined to those facts that contributed to a universal formula.

Desai raised an issue regarding the methodology used by Shah in this paper. To quote Desai: “He is aware that his knowledge is fragmentary and wants to put together the bits and pieces for the region as a whole. This would involve a little imagination and speculation” (1988: 42). Thus he hinted at the use of speculation and imagination and
therefore lacking a scientific approach, but also said, “the present state of sociology in India in general, and of the study of caste in particular, needs such imagination and speculation” (1988: 42). Thus, according to Desai, in India the field of research in sociology in general and of the study of caste in particular was based on imagination and speculation. The village studies in India, however, are an exception. They were based on field work and therefore cannot be said that they were based on imagination and speculation.

Shah mentioned that the study of caste in urban areas should consider the overall urban environment (1988: 29). In this context, Desai added and specified that the urban environment referred to the new consciousness based on interest (i.e., consciousness based on secular interest, either economic or political), and the study of urban caste should include the study of interaction between caste consciousness and interest consciousness, and its implications for caste consciousness. He was of the view that the consciousness based on interest was rival to the consciousness of caste (1988: 48). Thus, he specified that the study of caste in urban areas required us to distinguish the inter-caste relations based on secular interests from the inter-caste relations based on caste consciousness. Moreover, the unities based on economic, political and such other interests might differ from one another, and sometimes even opposed to one another. They all lead to decline in the emphasis on traditional hierarchy.

While describing changes in caste in modern India, Shah noted that as a result of increasing number of hypogamous marriages, “a new hierarchy was replacing the traditional one” (1988: 32). Desai added that the new hierarchy was secular and it would
replace the traditional hierarchy in future, and the new hierarchical order might be based on economic criteria. In short, what Desai meant was that the new hierarchy/divisions would be classes and not castes. Thus he saw transformation of castes into classes.

Desai further pointed out that each individual caste division was itself divided into higher and lower strata on the basis of new secular criteria and the solidarity of a caste was no longer what it was in the early 1950s. Ghurye (1932) took note of two tendencies in caste: the tendency of subcastes to amalgamate and form bigger wholes, and the formation of caste associations. He saw caste association as reflecting the community aspect of caste or caste consciousness. Shah also expressed similar views about caste associations. But Desai did not agree with this view of caste association. On the basis of his observations as a member of the Backward Class Commission, popularly known as Rane Commission, he distinguished between two functions of caste associations: (1) Caste association was formed to take advantage of the secular benefits offered to the caste when the caste was recognized as backward by the government. In case of castes which were not recognized as backward by the government, then their associations brought pressure on the government to recognise them as backward. They were also used to seek political influence by supporting one or the other political party to get representation in legislature or even in the ministry. (2) The other function of caste associations was service to the caste. Thus the caste association was mainly oriented to achieve economic and political benefits and then to social service. Desai saw the seeds of destruction of caste solidarity in the activities of caste associations. To quote him “I would argue that this content has the germ of destruction of the solidarity it seeks to create, though for a while it appears to succeed” (1988: 74). It seems necessary to
distinguish between the associations of higher caste from that of lower caste and study their activities to find the differences in their orientations. After examining the activities of various caste associations, he asked a question: who controls the caste associations? He was of the view that the economically, socially and educationally upper sections of upper castes controlled the higher caste associations. He rightly said that the effectiveness of a caste association would depend on its serving the needs of the people it claims to serve. These needs and problems are common to people of all castes. So the organizations that satisfy these needs are important. The caste associations exist and they provide the needs to their members only, and not to the members of other castes. In this sense it contributes to caste consciousness. Thus, “the community sentiment works because the nation fails to perform its function” (1988: 86). He further argued that the failure of the nation to satisfy these needs strengthens the community sentiment. He also pointed out that, to understand the role of caste associations in strengthening caste sentiment, and caste solidarity, it was necessary to understand the rise and growth of associations in each caste. However, Desai believed that caste associations and their activities strengthen the caste sentiment only peripherally, if at all.

Shah linked inter-caste (inter-divisional) marriages, with the idea of creating a casteless society, whereas, Desai saw individual choice in the selection of spouse rather than inter-caste marriages as more damaging to the caste system.

Caste subsists in the wider society, which was characterised with a higher degree of monetisation, a higher degree of contractual and market relations, and so on. These characteristics were more relevant in rural as well as urban areas in the 20th century.
These changes influence caste, and will weaken it. In his critique on Shah's paper Desai raised a number of issues regarding facts as well as methodology. He made the following five points: (1) He agreed with Shah that ritual hierarchy was ceasing to be the major problem of caste, but disagreed with Shah that it was happening slowly. He said that it was fast ceasing to be the problem of caste. (2) Desai emphasized the study of status distinctions that emerged on secular bases in individual castes, and in interactions between secular and traditional statuses both within a caste and between castes. Such studies would be useful intellectually and for the formation of social policy. (3) Desai emphasized the study of individual castes in their horizontal dimension with their rural-urban distinctions. (4) The tradition of studying individual castes existed and was required to be renewed. It was studied in relation to the future type of society. Behind the idea of future type of society Indian sociologists had a social philosophy. It was secular philosophy. (5) Castes should be seen as subsisting in the wider society.

Regarding the relationship between hypergamy and hierarchy, Desai observed associative function of hypergamy between the Rajputs and Kolis because it helped to blur the caste boundary, whereas in case of Khedawal Brahmins hypergamy helped to maintain the boundary and perform a disassociative function, because other Brahmins were not integrated with the Khedavals. Thus, hypergamy in the case of Khedaval Brahmins performed the boundary maintenance function. Moreover, he also pointed out that when hypergamy was internal to a caste, it did emphasize difference but that emphasis did not divide the caste. For example, the Patidars were divided into higher and lower gols but they remained Patidars. Thus he disagreed with Shah's interpretation of hypergamy.
According to Shah, the formation of caste associations in modern period reflected caste sentiment, but Desai did not agree with Shah. He was doubtful whether caste associations would maintain caste sentiment, because caste associations fulfilled secular (i.e., educational and economic) interests. According to Shah, caste patriotism may not disappear in the foreseeable future, but Desai believed that it would soon disappear.

Shah has classified castes into primarily urban, primarily rural, and primarily rural-cum-urban. The rural-cum-urban caste division extended beyond a particular town to another town or rural area through the mechanism of marriage and kinship. Marriage and kinship helped migration to urban areas. They strengthened the horizontal division.

Desai reacted to Shah’s observations about change in caste in modern Gujarat. He agreed with Shah’s observation that the so-called inter-caste marriages are largely inter-sub-caste marriages, and the sub-castes tend to form associations of the larger caste. Desai emphasized on need to pay more attention to the process of formation of associations of larger castes because they were formed to take advantage of the secular benefits offered to the caste if recognized as backward by the government, and the association brought pressure on the government to recognize it so. These motives and functions were part of the all India environment. At the all India level, the caste association used to seek political influence by supporting one or other political party. The second function that caste association performed was service to the caste. Thus the functions of caste associations were political, economic, and social service oriented. Desai said that the activities of caste associations would lead to destruction of caste solidarity that it seeks to create. He described with examples the political, economic, and
castes, depressed castes, broken men, and outcastes. Gandhiji called them “Harijans” or the children of God. In the 1931 census they were recorded as exterior castes. The term Scheduled Caste was used for the first time by the British government in the Government of India Act, 1935. Before 1935, some of these were labelled as depressed classes. In independent India, the term ‘schedules caste’ is used in the Constitution of India. These castes are identified by the President of India, under Article 431, and put under a schedule.

According to the 1991 census, the scheduled castes had a population of 138.22 million. They constitute 16.3 per cent of the population of India (Ahuja 2002:75). They are found in most of the states of India. Their concentration is high in UP, Bihar, West Bengal, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. The untouchables or scheduled castes are not a homogeneous category (Shah, A. M. 2002). They are divided into a number of sub-castes that do not enjoy the same status. In Gujarat the Scheduled Castes are divided into Vankar, Chamar, Bhangi, Meghval, Shenva, Garoda, Turi, Dheds etc. The Garodas enjoy highest status among them and the Bhangis are at the bottom of hierarchy. In between these two ends are Dhed (also known as Mahyavanshi or Vankar), Chamar, Meghval, and Shenva, and other untouchable castes.

Untouchability in Rural Gujarat

project regarding the practice of untouchability in rural Gujarat. As mentioned in the annual report of ICSSR for the year 1970-71, this was a pilot project, on the basis of which they had planned to undertake similar projects in other states of India. The main aim of the project was to collect and verify facts about the practice of untouchability in rural Gujarat. For this project, information was collected by interviewing the untouchables themselves, and the information thus collected was verified either by direct observation by the interviewers or by interviewing other persons.

According to the Census of 1971, there were 18,000 villages in Gujarat. Desai selected 69 villages representing all districts of Gujarat. The villages in which the population of untouchables was five or less than five were excluded from the study. The number of selected villages in a district was proportionate to the total number of villages in that district. The investigators lived in the selected villages. They observed and collected information about the behaviour of other castes or savarnas towards untouchables in sixteen different areas of behaviour. Their primary task was to collect information about the practice of untouchability in villages, and the secondary task was to observe the values, beliefs, attitudes and opinions of other people about the practice of untouchability. Desai examined the practice of untouchability in (a) the private sphere, which is governed by customs, and (b) the public sphere, which is governed by law. Within each sphere he examined twelve areas of behaviour in which untouchability operated. The investigators observed the behaviour of people towards untouchables in several different situations.
Source of Water

Since water is a basic necessity for human life, it was enquired whether the untouchables had proper facilities of drinking water. In this context, untouchability was observed in terms of the source of water for other castes and for untouchables in villages. It was found that in 64% of villages, there were separate sources of water for the untouchables and for the people of other castes. In 19% of villages, the source of water was common but the untouchables had to observe some norms before, during, or after drawing water. In 10% of villages there was no regular source of water for untouchables, and they were at the mercy of the people of other castes. In 7% of villages, the consciousness of untouchability did not exist in this context.

Entry in Temples, Houses and Shops

Untouchability was observed with reference to entry into temples, houses, and shops. Three villages allowed the untouchables to enter the temple and to worship. In seven villages they were allowed to enter the houses of other high castes. In eight villages they were allowed to enter shops. Only four villages allowed them to enter in all three places. Otherwise their entry into one of them was permitted but restricted to others.

Untouchability vis-à-vis Servicing Castes

Untouchability was observed with reference to servicing castes, such as barbers, tailors and potters. By and large, where these castes were Hindus, untouchability was found present in different degrees. Out of 51 villages that had Hindu barbers, only in
three villages they gave services to untouchables. Most of the villages had an untouchable barber, or the untouchables went out to an urban area for haircut. In 37 villages, potters were making pots. In 27 villages pots were sold to untouchables but they did not enjoy the right of selection. They themselves could not choose the pot. The pots were selected by the potter and then kept away for them to pick up. Only in 10 villages the untouchables enjoyed the right of selection. Out of 50 villages having tailors, 37 villages had Hindu tailors who belonged to the tailor caste. In 24 villages, untouchability was not practiced while taking the measurements of untouchables for stitching or repairing their clothes.

*Untouchability and Occupation*

Untouchability was observed with reference to occupation. Apart from certain constraints, a wide choice of occupations was available to untouchables. In some places, they were not allowed to sell milk to co-operative dairies in villages. The major constraint arose out of their economic position, illiteracy, and low level of educational attainment. They were engaged mainly in manual labour in the construction of houses. Generally, houses were protected from getting polluted. In the construction of houses the practice of untouchability differed from one village to another. In 34 villages, untouchables were employed to work on the external portion of the house or up to the plinth level of the new house. In 4 villages, they were fully employed due to shortage of other labourers. In 22 villages, untouchability came in the way of earning livelihood through manual labour. In 10 villages, they were not employed for repairing old houses, and only in 8 villages they were not employed in house construction activity. Thus, the
extent to which they were employed in construction work, untouchability can be said to have weakened.

The untouchables worked mainly as agricultural labourers. Out of 66 villages, in 61 villages untouchability in the fields was not observed, and they worked side by side the *savarna* workers. Only in 6 villages, they had to observe untouchability, i.e., they had to be careful not to touch the *savarna* workers. Untouchability was observed in touching the workers while paying wages. In this sphere of occupational relationship, untouchability was practiced in 37 villages. In these villages, the *savarnas* did not touch and also did not accept any currency notes or coins without sprinkling water.

*Untouchability at Commerical Places*

Untouchability was observed while giving things at the shop. The practice of untouchability in shops depended on the religion and caste of the shopkeeper, the sub-caste of the untouchable, things exchanged, and the type of the container used for carrying or giving liquid purchased. Mostly, they were not allowed to enter the shop. If they were allowed to enter the shop, the untouchables were discriminated after entering the shop. At times the local community compelled the shopkeeper to practice untouchability. In general, the local shopkeeper observed more untouchability than did a migrant *savarna* shopkeeper.
Untouchability in Public Institutions

The practice of untouchability in public institutions was also observed. This included the practice of untouchability in village panchayat meetings, primary schools, state bus transport, and the post office. In general, it was observed that untouchability was practiced in village panchayat meetings. Only in two villages, it was observed in bus transport and schools, and in 9 villages the postman was found to observe untouchability. In 24 villages, in panchayat meetings, the untouchables sat separately and were not served tea or water, and if served, they were served in separate cups.

Future of Untouchability

The practice of untouchability was observed in different spheres of life. From the selected villages, in 29 villages only one Scheduled Caste lived, and therefore, there was no scope to observe untouchability among the untouchables in these villages. In remaining 40 villages the information was collected about the practice of untouchability among the untouchables themselves. Desai observed that in 31 villages all other Scheduled Castes discriminated against the Bhangis, the lowest untouchables. In three villages the Shenvas were discriminated by the Chamars, and in one village the Chamars discriminated by the Vankars and Turis. Thus in 34 villages, untouchability was practiced by the untouchables themselves.

The practice of untouchability differed in different villages, and also in different spheres of life. In some cases it was observed more with reference to water facility and less in other spheres, whereas in one or two cases it was not observed with reference to
water facility but was observed more in other spheres. Untouchability did not exist in certain spheres, whereas it existed in other spheres. In transport, schools, and post office its practice was nearing extinction, whereas in case of temples, private houses, and shops untouchability existed. The village panchayat is a legal, political institution created by the new political order. In panchayats untouchability was near extinction by law. Though the panchayat was a new institution, in 50% of villages it was governed by old customs.

So, the areas of behaviour could be grouped into two types: (a) areas in which the old customs continued, and (b) areas in which old relationships were eroded by the new social order, i.e., the relationships were governed by new norms. The new social order established new relationships in which labour and capital were treated as commodities. Desai believed that with the spread of the new order the extinction of untouchability would be quicker.

Desai said that generally the administrators, policy makers, and social workers asked the question whether untouchability had increased or decreased and how the information about the practice of untouchability was useful to them. He considered this an insensible question because the practice of untouchability varied with village and the area of behaviour. According to Desai, the administrators, policy makers, and social workers were interested in removing untouchability, but the belief about increasing or decreasing untouchability could not provide any basis for action. Instead, the information based on empirical observations provided by this study was more useful to administrators or social workers.
The question is, what is the guarantee that the spread of the new order will definitely result in the extinction of untouchability? As found in this study, 50% of the village panchayats were governed by a mixture of old customs and new norms. In future also the modern institutions in villages may continue to be governed by a mixture of old and new norms. Then the chances of extinction of untouchability seem less; rather it may continue to exist in one or other spheres of life. However, it is certain that the modern institutions may not lead to increase in untouchability. According to Desai, there are two ways of reducing untouchability: (1) the untouchables themselves can monitor the proper implementation of law prohibiting untouchability, and (2) the development of economic organizations in rural areas can provide opportunities of earning livelihood to untouchables without any discrimination on the basis of caste or religion.

It is necessary to know the social structure of all villages studied by Desai because the practice of untouchability is related to the social structure of a village. For example, in the villages in which the untouchables were allowed to take water from the same source, it becomes necessary to know the other castes living in that village, if we want to have a clear idea about the degree of untouchability practiced. It is necessary to know the caste-wise composition of these villages studied by Desai. He criticized the administrators, social workers, and policy makers who ask questions about the prevalence of untouchability in different villages. But if the purpose was to receive suggestions to remove untouchability, then Desai could have suggested measures to remove untouchability.
Reservations

Our Constitution guarantees justice and equality of opportunity to all its citizens. It also recognizes that equal opportunity implies competition between equals and not un-equals. Our social structure consisted of inequality. Therefore, the makers of the Constitution thought that protection was required for weaker sections of society. The Constitution provided for protective discrimination under various articles to facilitate the process of creating an equalitarian society. It was decided in the Constitution to give preferential treatment to Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes. Thus reservation was a strategy to give them a share in power, in politics and administration and to uplift them socially and economically. In 1950, the constitution provided 12.5% reservation for SCs and 5% for STs but later in 1970 it was raised to 15% for SCs and 7.5% for STs. The reservation was provided in jobs, admission to colleges and universities and central and state legislative assemblies. Later it was also provided in nationalized banks and other public undertakings. All state governments also enacted laws providing for reservation for the SCs and STs in state services. The governments later added other concessions like reservation in promotions in government jobs.

The most important question is about the relationship between untouchability and reservation of seats in education and government jobs. Extinction of untouchability means removal of reservation for scheduled castes. These castes are identified on the basis of the practice of untouchability, and therefore it is a question as to how far the untouchables are interested in removal of untouchability. It is often observed that an
untouchable chooses to observe untouchability in matters of religious and ritual performances. It is a very complicated issue, which is both social and legal.

Our Constitution has provided reservation of seats in legislative bodies (Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies) and in educational institutions and government jobs for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. These castes are identified by the President of India under Article 431 and put them under a schedule. The term Scheduled Caste was used for the first time by the British government in the Government of India Act, 1935. The identification of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has been easy. By and large the Scheduled Castes are the former Untouchable or Harijan Castes.

During British rule a number of non-untouchable castes were identified as Backward Classes in different provinces and states under government orders at different times. They used the term Other Backward Castes in administrative usage. A special provision for Other Backward Classes is made in the Constitution of India wherein the term OBC is used to designate Backward Classes other than the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Article 15(4) refers to them as ‘socially and educationally backward classes of citizens’, and Article 340, as ‘socially and educationally backward classes’. Article 16(4) mentions ‘backward class of citizens’. And Article 46 refers to ‘the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people’. Thus, the Constitution of India has shown a special concern for Other Backward Classes. At the all-India level, the OBCs have to be identified by the President under Article 340. Under the articles 15(4) and 16(4), provisions for the advancement of Other Backward Classes could be made. The Central Government attempted to define the term OBC in order to
make special provisions for their advancement. To exercise the power conferred by article 340 of the constitution, the President of India appointed the first Backward Class Commission in 1953 under the chairmanship of Shri Kaka Kalelkar, and the report was submitted in 1955. The commission used a questionnaire to collect the views of the state governments and general public on different aspects of its inquiry.

The commission used the following criteria for identifying socially and educationally backward classes: (i) low social position in the traditional caste hierarchy in the Hindu society, (ii) lack of general educational advancement among the major sections of caste or community, (iii) inadequate or no representation in Government service, and (iv) inadequate representation in the fields of trade, commerce and industry. An all India list of 2399 backward castes or communities was prepared, of which 837 were classified as the most backward. The important recommendations of Kalelkar Commission include: (i) undertaking caste wise enumeration of population in the census of 1961; (ii) relating social backwardness of a class to its low position in the traditional caste hierarchy in the Hindu society; (iii) treating all women as a class as “backward”; (iv) reservation of 70% seats in all technical and professional institutions for qualified students of backward classes; and (v) reservation of seats in Government services and local bodies in all categories of class I to class IV vacancies for OBC.

The report of Kalelkar Commission was not unanimous. Five members of the commission did not agree with caste-based identification of backwardness. However, one member wrote a note favouring caste-based identification of backwardness. Kalelkar
himself was against caste-based identification of backwardness, but he did not write anything about it in his forwarding letter.

The Government presented this report with a memorandum before each house of Parliament in 1956. In the memorandum, the Government indicated its disagreement with two items of the report of the commission: the commission unanimously failed to arrive at the criteria for identifying backward classes, and if caste was accepted as the basis for identifying backwardness, then it would perpetuate the distinction based on caste and thus caste would perpetuate in Indian society. Kalelkar Commission Report suffered from internal contradictions and lack of use of proper methodology. For example, the report did not mention how the list of 2399 backward classes was prepared. There was an allegation that the commission had used a modified list compiled by the Ministry of Education for a different purpose. Moreover, the list was not verified by undertaking field survey. The Commission failed to explain the basis on which the reservation was recommended. Apart from this, the forwarding letter of Kalelkar was full of contradictions. Therefore, the Government did not accept the report. The Government decided that no all India list of backward classes should be drawn up, and that no reservation be made in the Central Government services for any backward class other than SCs and STs. In 1961, the Ministry of Home Affairs told the State Governments to choose their own criteria for defining backwardness, and also indicated that it would be better if it used economic criteria for defining backwardness rather than caste. It permitted the State Governments to adhere their own list of groups who belonged to backward classes. Thereafter, ten states set up fifteen commissions for identifying backward classes and suggesting measures for their upliftment.
However, another backward class commission was appointed by the Central Government during Prime Ministership of Shri Morarji Desai, in March 1979, under the chairmanship of Shri B. P. Mandal, ex-member of parliament, with five other members. According to Shri Mandal, the main task of the commission was to determine the criteria for defining the socially and educationally backward classes, and to recommend steps to be taken for their advancement (GOI 1980: 1). The report was submitted to the Government in December 1980. Mr. Mandal expressed that he faced many difficulties due to non-availability of the caste population data. He even requested to the Government to introduce enumeration of population of castes in the Census of 1981. The Government informed Mr. Mandal that it had decided not to include enumeration of caste in the Census.

The Mandal Commission constituted a Research Planning Team of seven sociologists. The members of the team met in Delhi for three days in June 1979 to prepare a plan for the researches to be undertaken by this commission to determine the criteria for socially and educationally backward classes. Since the Kalelkar Commission Report had not provided any objective test for identifying socially and educationally backward classes, the need for evolving such criteria on the basis of field investigations and other independent evidences was realized, and so the Mandal Commission emphasized the socio-educational field surveys. For this purpose, the Commission constituted a panel of fifteen experts under the chairmanship of Prof. M. N. Srinivas for preparing the design of a countrywide socio-educational field survey. The Panel met for four days in Delhi in July 1979 and prepared a set of schedules, dummy tables, instructions etc. for undertaking the survey. The Panel of Experts had prepared four
schedules for canvassing during the field survey: (i) household schedule for rural areas, (ii) household schedule for urban areas, (iii) village schedule, and (iv) town schedule. The panel of experts agreed with the observations of research planning team that the main task of the commission was to suggest the criteria for identifying socially and educationally backward classes. They laid down the criteria for identifying recognizable and persistent collectivities and not the individuals. It observed that “in the Indian context, such collectivities can be castes or other hereditary groups traditionally associated with specific occupations which are considered to be low and impure, with which educational backwardness and low income are found to be associated.” (GOI 1980: 55). To provide continuous guidance at the operational level, a Technical Advisory Committee was set up under K. C. Seal. It is to be noted that one anthropologist, B. K. Roy Burman was a member of all the three committees, namely, the Planning Committee, the Experts Panel, and the Technical Advisory Committee. This was mainly because he was a high official in the Census of India for many years.

The Mandal Commission recommended caste as the basis of identifying other backward classes and recommended a reservation of 27% for OBC in Government services as well as technical and professional institutions both in the Centre and States. Professor B. K. Roy Burman questioned the findings of the report, and the basis of their recommendations (Kuppuswami 1998: 258). He stated that the report was without any scientific base. It ignored every suggestion made by the experts associated with it. The experts were used but were not consulted for ultimate finding. The experts felt that: (i) they did not want the caste to be the basis but it approved of occupation or a combination of caste and occupation to be the basis, (ii) they did not know whether the findings were
based on the survey or personal impression or plain imagination, (iii) they did not know whether their survey design was being used, (iv) a spectrum of weightages for literacy given by them was not adopted, and (v) the data were not shown to them. He emphasized that Mr. Mandal wanted caste to be the sole criterion for identifying backwardness. Thus, the sociologists associated with Mandal Commission proposed occupation or both occupation and caste as the basis for identifying other backward classes. Thus, even though many sociologists were associated with Mandal Commission, it failed to take advantage of them. It is obvious from the note written by B. K. Roy Burman, that the Commission failed to take advantage of the skill and knowledge of experts, and that they were not involved in the analysis of data, nor in the preparation of report, nor its recommendations.

As mentioned earlier, the Central Government had rejected the recommendations of Kalelkar Commission Report and decided that no all India lists of backward classes should be drawn up, nor any reservation made in the Central Government services for any group of backward classes other than the Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes. However, as mentioned above, in 1961 the Ministry of Home Affairs had given freedom to State Governments to set up their own commissions or committees for choosing their own criteria of defining backwardness and recommending provisions for their advancement. It had also suggested that it would be better to apply economic test rather than caste for identifying backwardness. Following this, the Government of Gujarat appointed a backward class commission in 1972, under the chairmanship of Justice A.R. Baxi, popularly known as Baxi Panch. It submitted its report in 1976, listing 82 castes as socially and educationally backward classes. The Government of Gujarat accepted all the
recommendations of Baxi Punch in 1978. Accordingly, reservation in educational institutions and Government job was announced in July-August 1980. Thereafter, another commission was appointed in 1978 to consider Other Backward Classes under the chairmanship of Justice C.V. Rane, popularly known as Rane Commission. I. P. Desai was a member of this commission.

Desai’s publications regarding reservation policy in India include “Anti-reservation Agitation and Structure of Gujarat Society” (1981a) and “Should ‘Caste’ be the basis for Recognizing Backwardness?” (1984b), both published in Economic and Political Weekly. In his 1981a paper, he had analysed the agitation against reservation with reference to the social structure of Gujarat and explained that the real issue behind agitation was not reservation. The issue was more social and political.

The anti-reservation agitation in Gujarat was an agitation against reservation of seats in post-graduate courses in medical colleges for SC, ST, and SEBC. For the SEBC category, reservation was introduced in July-August 1980. A total of 25% seats were reserved for SC, ST, and SEBC. They constituted 60% of the state’s total population. Thus, 75% of the seats were open for 40% of the state’s population. These 75% of the seats were filled by open competition on the basis of merit.

On 31st December 1980, the student representatives of B.S. Medical College, Ahmedabad, sent a memorandum to the Ministry of Health, Gujarat Government, in which the following four demands were made: (i) immediate abolition of roster system, (ii) abolition of carry forward system, (iii) reduction of the number of seats in the
postgraduate level, and (iv) increase in the number of unreserved seats at the postgraduate level.

In reality, the actual number of students who occupied the reserved seats was much less than the seats available to them. In 1980–81, only 17 seats were available at the postgraduate level in medical faculties, but there were only 7 applicants. In 1979–80, 945 seats were available to SC and ST students on the basis of their percentage in the total population of Gujarat, but only 50% of the seats were filled by admission. Among the teachers in medical faculties in Gujarat, there was a very small number of SC and ST teachers. Among 60 professors there was only one professor from reserved category; among 293 assistant professors, five were SC; and among 273 tutors, 17 were from reserved category (out of which, 15 were SC and 2 were ST). It was pointed out that the presence of teachers from the reserved category had affected the standard of teaching in medical faculties. However, on the basis of the strength of teachers from the reserved category, Desai rejected the point that the standard of teaching had fallen due to these teachers.

On the basis of these figures one could say that there was no issue. Yet, the Government of Gujarat accepted the demands of upper caste medicos. The Government announced the following modifications in the policy of reservation: It abolished the "carry forward" system by immediate order; only 45% of the unfilled seats were to be accumulated and a fresh list of remaining unfilled seats was to be made every two years; it abolished the system of interchangeability of seats between SC, ST and SEBC; it
agreed to add one seat to the open seats for each SC seat filled in the specialized department.

All these concessions were in the favour of higher castes. Yet they rejected all concessions and put up a demand for the abolition of all reservations at all stages in jobs and educational institutions. The demand for total abolition of reservation came after 15 days of launching the agitation (on 31st December 1980).

In urban areas the agitation was supported by employees in government and semi-government establishments, employees in nationalized banks and LIC, by lawyers, university and college teachers, and business and industrial organizations. In rural areas, landowning agricultural classes supported the agitation, committed atrocities, and created terror among the SCs everywhere. The political parties which supported reservation included CPI (M), CPI and BJP. The Congress (I) and Gandhian leaders remained silent spectators. The Government and the beneficiaries of reservation, i.e., SC, ST, and SEBC, were on the other side of the agitation and was the target of attacks by the agitators. From among the beneficiaries of reservations, only SCs were made the target of violence in urban and rural areas. The agitation spread from central Gujarat to north Gujarat and south Gujarat and then to Saurashtra. The SCs suffered very heavily during the agitation in rural as well as urban areas. The Brahmmins, Banias, Patidars, and intermediate castes acted against the SCs and the police. In rural areas, the Kanbi Patidars in Kheda, Ahmedabad, and Mehsana districts played an active role in support of agitation. In the past, the Barias in Kheda and Thakors in Mehsana usually supported Patidars, but during
this agitation they supported them only once, and when they realized that they were also the beneficiaries of reservation, they stopped giving their support.

The question was, why there was violent agitation against SCs in 1980–81? The first and immediate cause of anti-reservation agitation, according to Desai, was the Chief Minister of Gujarat state and its legislative assembly. There was the Congress government, and for the first time a non-Brahman, non-Bania and non-Patidar became the chief minister, who was backed by 100 members of the Congress Legislature Party. Thus, latently, the intention was to remove either the chief minister or the policy of reservation.

Secondly, the social character of the population of Gujarat had changed after independence. A section of the population acquired great amount of social, economic and political power, such as owners of industries, traders, shopkeepers, contractors, middlemen and rich farmers. At the same time the numbers of industrial workers and landless labourers had also increased. Various services such as banking, insurance, education, and health had also grown. The Government also employed more people. Thus, the middle and salaried classes also grew and with them a new stratification based on secular criteria came into existence, and it coincided with traditional caste stratification. The higher castes grabbed all jobs created by economic growth. Similar developments took place among the intermediate castes, lower castes, and SCs, STs, and religious minorities. The SCs had a higher rate of literacy and participation in education than the STs. A new class of educated persons came into existence among these communities who served in white-collar occupations and lived a better style of life. They became spokesmen of these communities. However, whatever they had gained through
reservation was not very significant. The higher castes felt that if lower communities made advancement in education and occupation, it would lower the position of higher castes, socially and politically. Moreover, there were lower economic strata among the higher castes that did not get opportunities. Therefore, the high castes wanted to prevent the mobility of lower castes, and so opposed the reservation and argued in terms of merit. Thus, merit was used as a weapon for defending Hindu caste hierarchy and maintain socio-economic status quo. Thus, according to Desai, the anti-reservation agitation was a struggle by higher castes and by those in higher positions in the new stratification system.

From among the beneficiaries of reservation, the higher castes and the police attacked only SCs because they were small in number and in villages they were in minority. So they became easy targets. Thus Desai viewed reservation as a social and cultural issue associated with mobility. So, until mobility becomes possible the conflict will go on. The caste factor would also not disappear. The new secular lower strata in higher and lower castes would become more distinct and caste might become less effective. Some political party will have to organize them; otherwise the oppression of lower castes will continue to increase.

Pradeep Kumar Bose (1985) studied Gujarat riots and arrived at a similar conclusion. He said that when opportunities for mobility become scarce, it gave rise to strain and tension that culminated into caste riots. It also reflected the lack of tolerance of one section of society who could not digest the marginal improvement in the status of the SCs.
Desai’s Views on Caste-Based Reservation Policy

As mentioned earlier, the Government of Gujarat appointed a commission headed by Justice A. R. Baxi to identify Socially and Educationally Backward Classes other than SC and ST so that the government could give them similar help as given to SC and ST. The Baxi Panch submitted its report in 1976 and the Government accepted its recommendations in 1978. It recommended 82 castes to be considered as SEBC. After that, many other castes made representations to the Government and demanded to include them in SEBC category. Thereafter, the Government of Gujarat appointed another commission in 1978 headed by Justice C.V. Rane, popularly known as Rane Panch. I. P. Desai was a member of this commission. The members of Rane Panch toured 19 districts of Gujarat. They noticed differences in different occupations, land ownership, education and income, in rural and urban areas, and keeping these in mind, they suggested occupation (i.e., activities of earning one’s livelihood) instead of caste as the basis for identifying Socially and Educationally Backward Class in Gujarat. The recommendations of Rane Panch were based on the applications made by various castes and other groups to consider them as SEBC. Desai, as a member of Rane Panch, included a concurrent note in their report, in which he discussed in detail the changes in caste in Gujarat. The Government of Gujarat did not accept the recommendations of Rane Panch, stating that they were outside the terms of reference of the commission.

Desai did not approve of caste as the basis for judging social and educational backwardness and made the following arguments:
1. If caste was accepted as the basis for identifying social backwardness, it could mean that the state legitimised caste system by its own action. Before the British came to India, Indian kings legitimised caste system. But according to our Constitution, we had decided to abolish all inequalities based on caste and religion. Thus independent India was expected to take positive steps to create a society envisaged in the Constitution, and therefore caste could not be used as a basis for identifying backwardness.

2. According to our Constitution, we have been committed to create a casteless society, and a provision had to be made for using secular measures for deciding social backwardness of collectivities/groups other than SCs and STs.

3. There was a tendency among the people of different castes to prove that the status of their caste was as low as that of other low castes included in the Baxi Panch. But the members of the commission used secular criteria, such as poor economic condition, illiteracy, unemployment, and poor housing condition to judge their backwardness. Thus they wanted to use their traditional status for getting secular i.e., (economic and educational) benefits. He said it would not look cultured to remind some people of their low status.

4. The level of inequality between different Hindu castes changed from time to time. What Desai wanted to say was that the type and level of inequality between different Hindu groups after independence had declined in comparison to the past. Moreover, caste provided ascribed status. The principle of divisiveness was getting weak among low as well as high castes.
because of changes in attitude as well as changes on the basis of wealth, income, education, and occupation. The association between occupation and caste had weakened wherever the association existed between occupation and caste, and norms of governing occupational relations had changed. They were governed more by new norms and had become contractual relations.

5. Caste exists among religious communities other than Hindus. But in principle, those religions believed in equality. It certainly was not advisable for converts who have changed their religion, to get rid of their earlier caste name or the occupation of their forefathers, to use their caste names to take benefits of backwardness. Actually, the equalitarianism of non-Hindu religions could have been used to make caste system an equalitarian system; instead the equalitarianism of non-Hindu religions was vitiated by using caste as the basis of backwardness.

In January 1985, the Government of Gujarat decided to increase the quota for backward classes in government jobs and admissions to medical and engineering or technical institutions to 28 per cent. This was in addition to the reserved quota for SCs and STs. Thus, the government had increased the aggregate percentage of reserved jobs in government employment at all levels to 49 per cent. The Government claimed that it had followed the recommendations of the Rane Commission. It should be pointed out here that this was incorrect. There were riots and agitations against the Government’s decision to increase the reservation quota for backward classes and the then Chief Minister had to resign. According to the editorial in The Times of India dated 17th
January 1985, Rane commission’s main proposal was that occupation and family income - less than Rs. 10,000 a year - should be the only basis for identifying the beneficiaries. However, it is a fact that the government did not publish their report. Two social scientists, A. M. Shah and D. L. Sheth had written a letter to the Times of India dated 13th February 1985 in which they pointed out, “The least the government owes to the public and to the members of the commission (one of whom, Prof. I. P. Desai, passed away a few days ago) is to publish immediately the commission’s report which it has not done for more than 15 months” (Shah, 1985). To the best of my knowledge it has not been published so far. The Centre for Social Studies invited scholars to give their reactions to Desai’s paper “Should ‘Caste’ be the Basis for Recognizing Backwardness?” (1984b), and published the reactions of other scholars in its quarterly magazine Arthat (1985, Vol.4, No. 1-2). Following are the views of some scholars regarding the basis for deciding backwardness.

Ghanshyam Shah (1985) criticized Desai’s proposal of using occupation and class as the basis for deciding social and educational backwardness of a group. The following were his main arguments:

1. In a country of prevailing economic and political structure, the opportunities in the life of an individual were decided by his birth in a particular family. High caste status, higher education and high occupations have been inter-linked.
2. Within a caste, people differ in terms of their economic condition but that does not mean that a class-based society had come into existence.

3. Desai failed to notice "the feeling" among the members of the caste as reflecting caste consciousness. Desai did not examine the economic social and political structure, which was to execute the recommendations of Rane Panch. Desai expressed his faith in the guiding principles of the Constitution.

4. If the Government had accepted the recommendations of Rane Panch to decide backwardness on the basis of occupation, then the benefit of reservation would have gone to poor members of high castes such as Vania, Brahmin and Patidar, but poor members of low castes such as Koli, Vaghari, Machhi, Sidi, Sinnai etc would not get the benefit of reservation in Government jobs. Therefore, he advocated a combination of caste, social group and class as the basis of backwardness so that the poor and low caste members of different religions get the benefit of reservations. He also suggested that de-scheduling should be built into the policy of reservation. All in all, Ghanshyam Shah favoured a mixture of caste, class and religion as the basis for judging backwardness.

It is to be noted that the report of the Rane commission resulted in riots in Gujarat and the then Government had to resign from power. The Government of Guajarat has yet not published its report.
Upendra Baxi (1985) replied to the issues raised by Ghanshyam Shah in his paper “Caste, Class and Reservation”. According to Baxi, Shah did not propose caste-based reservation but insisted on devising a strategy whereby caste structure and caste feeling could get weakened. He also proposed that an ideological conflict against caste and communal thinking was necessary. Baxi reacted positively to Shah’s suggestions and pointed out that Desai did the same job as a member of Rane Commission. Desai wrote in favour of creating a casteless Indian society, and according to the Constitution, the State is committed to create such a society. Baxi pointed out that nothing could be gained from controversy. Shah agreed with Desai that irrespective of caste or religion the poor of high castes should get a chance for development. Baxi agreed completely with Desai’s proposal and view that we needed to decide about the type of society we wanted to create. The picture of that society has already been given in the third and fourth chapters of our Constitution. Therefore, we need to decide whether we would like to support caste or values expressed in our Constitution.

D. L. Sheth (1985) saw backwardness as the result of social injustice done to various castes in the past. Thus social injustice was historically determined. He did not see any relationship between caste and backwardness. According to Desai, caste-based protection would mean protection to caste system. The idea of reservation should have been thought of in the context of landless labourers, unskilled and illiterate occupations and urban unorganized labor and other economic and social groups, but not in the context of caste. Once we decide to do so, then the methods of implementation could be thought of. For Desai, the question of reservation was a question of principles and values. Caste based reservation was against the secular society envisaged in our Constitution and it
would obstruct the secular processes that have been going on in society, and in the long run it would be a hindrance to the backward classes movement. And whatever changes have come in the direction of creating a secular society would come to a halt. However, Desai agreed to a view that the present system of reservation would not be helpful in removing backwardness of backward people but it would certainly strengthen the caste system.

Sheth agreed with Desai’s above-mentioned viewpoint with reference to aims, targets and values accepted in our Constitution. But he was not convinced that Desai’s proposed bases of reservation would lead the society in the direction of change desired by him.

Sheth pointed out that there were contradictions between different principles envisaged in our Constitution. The reservation policy for SCs and STs has been based on religion and caste, and at the same time the Constitution accepted the goal of creating a casteless society or secular society. Apparently there was a contradiction. But in the context of its function they were found to be supportive processes. Backwardness was a similar case. Reservation was not aimed at removing backwardness. Progress or development could remove backwardness. Reservation was basically a means to remove social injustice. Thus, the extent to which social injustice obstructs development, reservations were related to backwardness. There has been an indirect relationship between reservations and backwardness. Backwardness was directly related to the process of development, and reservations with the process of human rights.
For ages in India, the economic system had been associated with the structure of caste system and even today many castes continue to be associated with their traditional occupations and thereby related to caste system. Thus, the form of backwardness had not been economic but social, and therefore, the basis of recognizing backwardness as well as of the removal of backwardness should necessarily be social. In this sense, reservations could be understood as a precondition for removing backwardness of backward castes and not as a direct means to remove backwardness.

Thus, according to Sheth, from the point of view of historical perspective certain castes had suffered from social injustice and they continued to suffer on the basis of caste. Therefore, injustice could only be removed on the basis of caste. Thus, if we establish the relationship of reservation with social justice, then the bases for the execution of policy of reservation as suggested by Desai, namely, education and occupation, did not seem to be capable of removing social backwardness. These secular bases have already been in use in various programmes of development. For example, for the bank loans under the IRDP programme, the applicants were given loans on secular basis, but majority of its beneficiaries had been the backward families or individuals of high castes compared to the number of families or individuals of backward castes. This has been proved by many researches. The same thing could happen in the field of reservation as well.

However, Sheth agreed with Desai that through reservation or through other help, we might not be able to remove backwardness or social injustice. Reservation in itself was incomplete but necessary means to achieve the goals of equality. At the same time,
other means, such as movements by political groups, especially movements by backward class or caste associations, should be used to achieve the goals of equality.

Sheth proposed to make provision on the basis of which people could get out of the system of reservation. And for that purpose Sheth agreed with Desai's proposal of considering education, occupation and income as the basis for measuring backwardness. But he adds that the basis of caste should be included along with the secular basis. He believed that the new provision of reservation would strengthen the principles of secularism and social justice in the process of social change.

For this purpose, it was necessary to prepare a list of extremely backward castes in different regions, and then with the help of secular criteria, to decide the beneficiaries of reservation from these castes. Thus, the problem of secularism and equality could be resolved, according to Sheth. If the secular basis/foundation was recognizable and measurable, then they should be made applicable to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as well, so that the provision for coming out of reservation would get built into the system of reservation. Thus, the families and individuals of these castes, who cross a specified limit in terms of education, occupation, and income, would stop getting the benefits under reservation.

The question of implementing Mandal Commission report was taken to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court gave its judgment in November 1992, and upheld the decision to reserve 27 per cent government jobs for the Other Backward Classes. The Supreme Court in its verdict mentioned that the creamy layer among the OBCs was to be
excluded from reservations. The creamy layer included the educated and well-employed people having improved status compared to other OBCs who have to be excluded from reservations. This is similar to what Desai and Ghanshyam Shah called de-scheduling.

Concluding Remarks

Desai criticized Ghurye that his writings were not based on any fieldwork or empirical observations. Desai also expressed his commitment to a political ideology and said, “I feel committed to the direction given by Marx” (1984a: 645). These ideas are very well reflected in his publications on caste, untouchability and reservation. While observing change in caste system and analysing the relationship between caste and politics, Desai referred to empirical reality and discussed his points by giving examples from reality. His commitment to Marx’s ideology is reflected in his choice of topic for research. He was sympathetic to the weaker sections of Indian society and thus undertook the project regarding the practice of untouchability in rural Gujarat. His observations suggest that (i) caste has not remained what it was, (ii) caste is dissociated from occupation, and (iii) rules of commensality have greatly weakened, except in the context of religion. However, according to him, we need reliable and adequate data about caste. This would help to judge change in the case system with precision and would also help to predict future trends in caste system in India.

Desai argued that a change in the case system would be possible if the norm-setting group of society decided to do so by supporting and propagating new beliefs. He viewed caste as a psychological possession of people, which existed in the minds of
people. However, Srinivas (2003) wrote in his last writing on caste that caste as a system of production was getting destroyed at the village level and at the local level. He wrote, "A combination of wholly new technologies, institutions based on new principles, and a new ideology which includes democracy, equality, and the idea of human dignity and self-respect has to be in operation for a considerable time to uproot the caste system." (2003:459).

While arguing with Shah about changes in caste in Gujarat in the modern period, Desai asserted that caste was transforming into class and he expected that it would disappear very fast. While agreeing with Shah, he described various political, economic and social service functions of caste associations, but also pointed out that when these needs would be satisfied by other organizations or agencies, then the caste associations would lose their importance. According to Desai, caste associations reflected the need sentiment and not the caste sentiment. But this argument is not convincing because many people of different castes might have had similar needs. It was the sentiment of caste which made them satisfy the needs of the members of their caste. It is a combination of both the sentiments that make people to donate to caste associations, and it is well known that caste associations help only the members of their caste.

Government has taken many ameliorative measures to remove the disabilities and exploitation of untouchables or Dalits. The important measures taken are: (1) abolition of untouchability, (2) protection from social injustice and various forms of exploitation, (3) throwing open to them religious institutions of public character, (4) removal of restrictions on their access to wells, tanks, shops, restaurants, roads, etc., (5) giving them
the right to move freely and acquire property, (6) giving them the right of admission to educational institutions and receiving grants out of state funds, (7) permitting the state governments to make reservation for them in services, (8) giving them special representation in the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha, (9) setting up separate departments and advisory councils to promote their welfare, (10) prohibiting forced labour, and (11) making special provision for the administration and control of the scheduled areas.

Most important was the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Under this Act the following acts are described as punishable crimes: (1) forcing an SC/ST person to eat or drink some disgusting substance, (2) throwing refuse in the house or the neighborhood of an SC/ST person, (3) taking away clothes forcibly from the body of an SC/ST person, making him naked, or blackening his face and taking him round the public places, (4) forcibly occupying the land owned by an SC/ST person or allotted to him, (5) usurping land or property of an SC/ST person, (6) compelling an ST/SC person for forced labour or using him as a bonded labourer, (7) preventing an ST/SC person from voting or forcing him to vote for a particular person, (8) committing any act against an SC/ST person which may be punishable, (9) humiliating an SC/ST person, (10) molesting an SC/ST woman, (11) sexual harassment of an SC/ST woman, (12) polluting the drinking water used by an SC/ST person, and (13) forcing an SC/ST person to leave his house, neighbourhood or his village.
To safeguard their interests a commission for SCs and STs was created at national level. The State Governments also have separate departments to look after their interests. There are many voluntary organizations to promote their welfare (Ahuja 2002: 78).

Despite all these measures the SCs have not achieved much success in improving their condition. Desai’s study on the practice of untouchability in rural Gujarat clearly indicates that the practice existed in different spheres of behaviour in different degrees in different villages. Although it is quite elaborate in its analysis, it neglected the caste structure of villages studied. Probably, that information would have thrown some more light on the changing attitude of different castes towards untouchability in rural Gujarat. The fact that the practice of untouchability was operative, while law had banned its practice, in different spheres of behaviour, is important, which shows that the law alone cannot bring about social change.

Even today, for example, many cases are reported where Dalits are admitted to schools but are made to sit on separate benches in the same class. There was a strike in Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi because SC students were served food in the common mess (Ahuja 2002: 75). In 1998, a Dalit youth was killed in a village in Maharashtra because he took refuge in a temple during rains (Ahuja 2002: 75). Even though our Constitution outlawed the practice of untouchability and the Untouchability Act of 1955 declared its practice as legal offence, its practice has not been uprooted from socio-religious life of our country.

Desai’s commitment to Marx’s ideology is also reflected in his writings about reservation. He proposed occupation and income as the basis for reservation and strongly
opposed only caste as the basis of reservation. B. K. Royburman was a member of three
different committees appointed by the Mandal commission, who expressed the view that
social scientists associated with the Mandal Commission did not agree with the proposal
of considering caste as the basis for reservation, but the social scientists proposed caste
and occupation as the basis of reservation. Thus, we can derive that M. N. Srinivas, who
was also associated with the Mandal Commission was of the same opinion. Thus, once
again I. P. Desai and M. N. Srinivas differ with reference to the basis of reservation. Both
of them agreed on the criterion of occupation but disagreed on the other criterion to be
adopted for identifying the other backward classes. Desai was sympathetic to Marxist
ideology, and therefore he considered income and occupation as the basis of reservation.
However, considering the changes that have come in Indian society, particularly, when
occupation has disassociated from caste, it is doubtful whether occupation can still be
used as the basis for identification of backwardness. Therefore, the only alternative left,
which would be acceptable to all social groups in Indian society, seems to be income, and
Desai already emphasised income as one of the criterion in identification of
backwardness. Here again there is one problem. The unit for recognising backwardness
has to be a group or collectivity. By using the economic criteria, it is possible to identify
the individual and thus the unit of identification would be an individual and not a
collectivity. Thus, the problem of reservation is more complex and complicated
particularly at the all India level. It seems that the policy of reservations for SCs and STs
is acceptable to all, but attempts to resolve the issue of backwardness of Other Backward
Castes have been controversial.