Chapter 1

Introduction: Life and Work of I. P. Desai

To understand I. P. Desai's work, one has to keep in mind his personal, intellectual, academic and professional development from early days of schooling to college, and then during his career as a teacher and a scholar when he developed most of his ideology and theoretical concepts, which are reflected in his writings. In this chapter, I have provided a sketch of his life, his publications, and his theoretical and methodological ideas. This will provide a background for the rest of the chapters.

A Sketch of I. P. Desai's Life

Ishwarlal Pragji Desai (I. P. Desai; only I.P. for many of his friends) was born on 31st July, 1911 at village Parujan, Taluka Navsari, Surat District, Gujarat. After completing his primary education in Parujan he went to Surat for secondary education. He stayed there in the Anavil Ashram, a hostel for the students of Anavil caste, to which he belonged. It was later known as Dayalji Ashram. This Ashram was at that time a centre for activities of the independence movement and Dayalji Desai was closely associated with the movement (Shah, Ghanshyam 1985a: 10). Consequently, I. P. Desai was influenced by Dayalji's ideas and joined the Civil Disobedience Movement. Moreover, the Russian revolution and Marxism had tremendous impact on I. P. Desai. Dinkar Mehta, a Marxist, who participated in Civil Disobedience Movement of Mahatma Gandhi, influenced I. P. Desai, due to which he joined the movement with Dinkar Mehta (Shah, Ghanshyam 1985a: 10). After completing his high school education, he joined the
M.T.B. Arts College in Surat in 1929 (Gore 1980: 22-23) but did not continue his studies, as he was associated with the Civil Disobedience Movement. Desai wrote about it in a note, “From 1930 to 1932, I was an active political worker. I moved about in the villages of the present Surat and Valsad districts” (1981c: 53). Later he completed his high school education. He then joined Wilson College in Bombay (Gore 1980: 22) and got his B.A. degree of Bombay University in 1934. He then studied for M.A. degree at the School of Economics and Sociology in Bombay University. Bombay University at that time offered the M.A. degree course at this School entirely by research, or a student had to select four papers in sociology and four papers in economics or political science. I. P. Desai studied four papers each in sociology and economics.

In 1942, I. P. Desai completed his Ph.D. thesis entitled, *Social Bases of Crime*, under the guidance of G. S. Ghurye. I. P. Desai selected the same primitive societies, which J. D. Unvin had chosen for discovering the relation between ‘Sex and Culture’. Desai wrote about his selection of Ph.D. topic, “The model that I had adopted for my study was from the [books], *Material Culture and Social Institutions of Peoples: An Essay in Correlation*, by Hobhouse, Wheeler and Ginsberg (1915) and *Sexual Regulation and Cultural Behaviour*, by J. D. Unvin (1934)” (1981b: 23-24). It is noteworthy that I. P. Desai based his thesis on published materials, while many of his classmates based their theses on field materials. He gave tuitions to high school students and also worked in a pharmaceutical industry to earn some money when he was studying at Bombay (Shah, Ghanshyam 1985a: 10). Srinivas (1988: ix) pointed out in his Foreword to Shah and Desai’s book that, Desai usually worked on his Ph.D. thesis at night and worked as a teacher during the day.
I. P. Desai was appointed in June 1944 as a research assistant to Ghurye for two years, in Ghurye's project on "Fasts, Feasts and Festivals of Hindus of India". He collected data from Bihar and Orissa for the project. This was his first academic job and first experience of collecting field data.

In November 1945, I. P. Desai joined Samaldas College at Bhavnagar, in the former princely state in Saurashtra. This college was affiliated to Bombay University in those days. He was appointed there first in the economics department as a lecturer. After two years, sociology was introduced as a subject in the college. He taught both the subjects at the undergraduate level. Thus he became the first teacher of sociology in Gujarat. Along with his teaching work, he developed interest to study a tribe called Padhar in the Bhavnagar region. He developed this interest while teaching a book, *Habitat, Economy and Society* written by the British anthropologist Darryl Forde. The students also got interested in the description of tribes in this book and suggested that they would like to visit a tribe in the Bhavnagar region, namely, Padhars. They went there, stayed for a week or so, and took notes and photographs. But Desai did not know what to do with this data. It was at Bhavnagar where he realized that a Ph.D. degree did not train him to do field research. He wrote, "This episode, though seemingly insignificant, made me realize that a Ph.D. degree or teaching in the class room did not prepare a person for doing research on his own" (Desai 1981c: 25). However, he submitted his proposal to study the Padhars to Bombay University and applied for a research grant from it. But before he could go further in this direction he left Bhavnagar. It should be noted that the small town of Mahuva where he conducted his major research project later, in the 1950s-1960s, was located very near Bhavnagar.
In 1951 I. P. Desai left Bhavnagar to join the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute at Poona. Irawati Karve was the Head of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the Institute. This department taught Anthropology and Sociology at the post-graduate level, but research was given prime importance at the institute. A staff member was evaluated mainly on the basis of his research. Every five years a committee was appointed to evaluate the institute as well as its staff members. Those who failed to produce research had to leave the institute, as the workload of teaching was very little. Desai undertook his first independent research when he was at this institute. The subject of his research was “The Social Background of High School Students in Poona”.

In June 1951 M. N. Srinivas joined the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda as the first Professor and Head of its Department of Sociology in the Faculty of Arts. In the beginning, sociology was taught at the B.A. and Ph.D. levels. Even at the B.A. level it was taught initially only as a subsidiary subject, comprised of two papers. A full-fledged B.A. (Honors) course in Sociology was introduced later. There was a demand to start teaching of sociology at the M.A. level. Again, it was introduced step by step: first as a two-paper course, then as a four-paper course, and then as an eight-paper course. In order to expand the subject, Srinivas managed to get three posts sanctioned for the Department of Sociology from the funds of the University. Out of these three posts, one was of a Clerk-typist, another was of a Research Assistant, and the third was of a Reader. Srinivas had to appoint some one on the post of a Reader. He chose I. P. Desai for this post. Srinivas has made some significant remarks on this appointment: “My choice for the readership in sociology was Dr. I.P. Desai, who was then a lecturer in sociology at
Deccan College, Poona. Dr. Desai was my senior by several years but we had known each other from our days as students under Prof. Ghurye in the Department of Sociology in Bombay University. We had a joking relationship with each other and, underlying the joking relationship, respect. I knew that I.P.'s ideas of Sociology were different from mine in some ways but I regarded it as a factor in his favour. I wanted someone who would supplement my skills” (Srinivas 1981:180).

Thus I. P. Desai joined the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in 1952. He worked as a Reader and thus as a colleague of Srinivas till 1959. When Srinivas left Baroda for Delhi, I. P. Desai was appointed as Professor and Head of the Department. He remained in this position till 1966. Thus, he worked in Baroda University for a long period of 14 years. During this period he made a great impact on both teaching and research in the department. Six students completed Ph.D. theses under his guidance at Baroda. He also carried out a large research project on the small town of Mahuva and a study on migration.

I. P. Desai sought premature retirement from Baroda University in 1966 with a view to establish a centre for carrying out research in social sciences, called the Centre for Regional Development Studies, at Surat. After necessary preliminary preparations, he established this Centre, with himself as Director, in 1968. Later it came to be known as Centre for Social Studies. This Center became well known nationally and internationally for carrying out research in a number of fields. It also trained research students in collaboration with South Gujarat University. Three students completed Ph.D. theses under his guidance here. I. P. Desai retired from the Centre in 1977 as Founder-Director.
However, he continued to be the Chairman of its Board of Governors for some time. He gave up this position also. He, however, remained active in his research and writing till the end. He breathed his last on January 26, 1985.

I. P. Desai was closely associated with the work of the Indian Sociological Society and its journal *Sociological Bulletin*, since their beginning. He played an important role in uniting two professional bodies, namely, the All India Sociological Conference and the Indian Sociological Society, along with M. N. Srinivas and other leading sociologists. They were successful in uniting the two bodies in 1967 and M. N. Srinivas was elected the President under the new arrangement. I. P. Desai became its President from 1976 to 1978.

**Works of I. P. Desai**

During 40 years of his professional life, Desai wrote on a variety of topics, such as education, family, caste, tribe, untouchability, reservation, migration, social movements, and social change. He wrote seven books, twenty-one articles, and five unpublished reports in English independently, and three books, two articles and seven unpublished reports jointly with other scholars. He also wrote one book, two articles and one report in Gujarati independently, and one book with other scholars in Gujarati. His publications are listed in a separate section in the Bibliography at the end of this thesis.

In all the fields in which Desai researched and wrote, he has shown his originality in the treatment of the subjects. He has raised basic questions and suggested new approaches in these fields. His work on family is widely quoted by scholars. He has
questioned the then existing definition of joint family and suggested a new definition. His approach was more critical and open to new ideas in sociology. His research work shows a combination of anthropology and sociology. When he was a student, sociology had not developed as an independent discipline. No distinction was made between Indology, ethnography and sociology. However, as contrasted with Srinivas, he was more inclined to sociology, rather than anthropology, though he was not explicit about it.

Desai’s autobiographical sketch (1981b) gives us a clear picture of what was taught to students, and how it was taught to them during his time as a student, and what difficulties he had to face as a researcher because of lack of adequate training and knowledge. He has discussed positive and negative aspects of his research work, which reflects his true spirit as a research scholar. Desai inculcated the spirit of scientific attitude, and was committed to scientific principles of research. He followed these principles to evaluate his own work.

**Historical Development of Sociology in India**

In order to understand Desai’s work it is necessary to understand the intellectual and social context in which he grew up. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the origin and development of sociology in India.

In India, sociology was first introduced in Bombay University in 1914. Between 1914 and 1920 sociology was introduced in several universities in India. Of these departments, two departments of sociology have made lasting influence on the development of sociology in India. One of them is Bombay Department and the other
Lucknow Department. They pioneered in specific fields of research in sociology and influenced the students trained in these departments. These two departments can be called two important schools of sociology in India. I will briefly discuss the two schools.

**Bombay School**

In 1914 sociology was introduced at the post-graduate level in Bombay University. In 1919 a separate department of sociology was established under the leadership of Patrick Geddes. The M.A. students had to study four papers in sociology and four papers in economics. After 1930, a full-fledged eight-paper course was introduced. Patrick Geddes recommended G. S. Ghurye’s name for a fellowship to pursue higher studies in U.K. Ghurye wanted to study there under the guidance of L. T. Hobhouse at the London School of Economics. Later he changed his mind and went to the Department of Anthropology in Cambridge University. He studied for his Ph.D. under W. H. R. Rivers and A. C. Haddon. Rivers’ ideas had a long lasting impact on him. After he returned from Cambridge, he was made Head of the Department of Sociology in Bombay University. He began to contribute to sociology by writing his first book entitled *Caste and Race in India*, which was in fact his Ph.D. dissertation at Cambridge. Later he extensively wrote on various other subjects, such as kinship, marriage, urbanization, ascetic traditions, tribal life, demography, architecture, and literature. In his works we find a synthesis of Indological, Sociological and Anthropological perspectives. As pointed out by Shah (Shah, A. M. 1994: 8), it was because of his Sanskrit background that he used the Indological perspective; because he studied under Hobhouse, he was influenced by the Sociological perspective; and since he did his Ph.D. under an
anthropologist W.H.R. Rivers, he was exposed to the anthropological perspective. Therefore, in Ghurye’s works we find a synthesis of these three perspectives. In spite of these three traditions, he was always interested in empiricism. He encouraged his students to collect data through fieldwork as well as through study of literature. He trained in his department some of the distinguished Indian sociologists, such as M. N. Srinivas, K. M. Kapadia, A. R. Desai, Irawati Karve, Y. B. Damle, M. S. A. Rao, and many others. I. P. Desai was one of them.

In 1952, Ghurye founded Indian Sociological Society and started a journal, *Sociological Bulletin*. The Society organized symposia from time to time, which provided a meeting ground for sociologists and anthropologists to exchange their views. Thus the Bombay Department played an important role in professionalisation of the discipline. Under G. S. Ghurye’s leadership, the Department of Sociology at Bombay University became a leading centre of research in Sociology in India. The students trained in this department established new departments of Sociology in India, all of which became active departments under their leadership. Thus the scholars of Bombay department contributed significantly to the development of sociology in India.

**Lucknow School**

In 1921 a combined department of Economics and Sociology was started in Lucknow University. Radha Kamal Mukherjee was appointed as Professor and Head of this department. Later D. P. Mukerjee and D. N. Majumdar joined this department. Together they developed this department. In course of time a separate Department of
Anthropology was created under the headship of D. N. Majumdar. Thus, Lucknow became an influential centre of teaching and research in Sociology and Anthropology. Radha Kamal Mukherjee developed a theory of human migration and settlement. He argued that human beings, like plants, thrive best in the frontiers, which are similar in environment to those in which they have already succeeded. D. P. Mukerjee was influenced by Marxian thought. He emphasized on economic factors in the process of cultural change. Later he changed his view and expressed that social research in India should be based on the study of Indian traditions, customs, rituals, myths, and folkways. D. N. Majumdar studied for his Ph.D. at Cambridge. He carried out research on Physical and Cultural Anthropology. He conducted surveys of many tribes and castes in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Bengal.

Other Departments

In 1930 a combined department of sociology and anthropology was started in Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute at Poona under the Headship of Iravati Karve. She was initially a student of Ghurye and then studied in Germany. She studied different types of kinship systems in India. In 1946, a Department of Sociology was created in Osmania University, although social anthropology was already taught there for the B.A. course since 1928. S. C. Dube was associated with this department for some time.

In 1951 M. N. Srinivas, a student of Ghurye, founded the Department of Sociology in the Faculty of Arts in the M.S. University of Baroda. I. P. Desai joined this
department in 1952 and became its Head in 1959. In the same year, M. N. Srinivas founded another Department of Sociology in Delhi University.

Theoretical and Methodological Ideas of I. P. Desai

In this background let us examine the academic development of Desai. According to Desai, when he was a student in Bombay there was no course on methodology of research. Sociology was still not studied as a science. Sociology was supposed to be based on practical life, and oriented towards future, i.e., change (Desai 1981c: 20). The sociological and social anthropological theories developed in Britain and America were taught to students in Bombay University. Thus there were two major influences on sociological research in India: the British influence and the American influence. Between the two, however, British influence was stronger. When Desai was a student in Bombay University, there were two teachers, G. S. Ghurye and N. A. Thoothi. Ghurye was trained at Cambridge and Thoothi at Oxford. Thus Desai was influenced by the ideas and approaches of these two teachers.

In those days the research problem for a Ph.D. student was usually suggested by the teachers (Desai 1981c: 21). Students generally followed the topics studied by previous students, which were traced through their dissertations. After reading relevant material, the student would discuss it with his teacher. Then they would arrive at a problem, and the work would begin. A major distinction was made between library studies and field studies. Library studies were mostly historical. Historical facts were interpreted according to one's views. The teacher's role was to see if the student had
collected sufficient and relevant evidence and that he had not suppressed any contrary
evidence. The logic of interrelation was examined. In case of field studies, the student
had to stay in the field for quite some time, approximately between six and twelve
months. The teacher's job was to see if observations made by the student were sufficient
and precise. There were no books on theory or methodology. The only method used was
comparative method. There was an emphasis on impartial and adequate observation, on
logical reasoning based on evidence, and cultivation of scientific attitude. All these were
not taught but were learnt while talking to teachers or observing them when they
practiced it. Desai called it a process of disciplining the mind. It was not training into a
craft. Thus, a student was given an opportunity to develop a world-view and scientific
outlook according to his ability and interest (Desai 1981c: 22).

The second generation of sociologists, like Desai, was trained in this manner at
Bombay and elsewhere. They carried the imprint of the founders. In his autobiographical
sketch (Desai 1981b), Desai has discussed positive aspects of his research work, and also
its limitations. This reflects his scientific spirit. To evaluate one's own work and discuss
its weaknesses demands courage and commitment to scientific principles of research.
Desai was committed to science throughout his life.

After the Second World War, Indian Sociology came under heavy impact of
American sociology and anthropology. Initially, there were two schools in American
Sociology; one was Chicago School and the other was Harvard School. The Chicago
School pioneered in fieldwork as a method of research. But as they faced the problems of
urban society they began to develop survey research methods and statistical analysis,
which later on were perfected at Columbia University by Merton and Lazarsfeld. At Harvard, under the influence of Sorokin and Parsons the emphasis was more on theory building. Before the World War, Sociology in USA could be described as too general, with all branches without any trunk, but in India, after the World War, there was a trend towards specialization, either individuals or Departments specializing in different branches of Sociology.

Desai’s Ph.D. thesis, entitled *Social Bases of Crime*, was entirely based on library work. It did not involve any fieldwork. M. N. Srinivas was among the first to do field work in south India for his teacher Ghurye. He did this as Ghurye’s Research Assistant. Ghurye had taken up a project on Fasts, Feasts, and Festivals of Hindus all over India. When Srinivas left for Oxford to do Ph.D., I. P. Desai replaced him as research assistant and collected data without using any methods of research, such as sampling or schedule. He used an unstructured interview guide. His method of data collection involved induced questions, probing, and elaboration.

When Desai joined Samaldas College at Bhavnagar in 1945, he wanted to study the Padhars, a tribe in the Bhavnagar region. However, he was unable to decide what to study and how to study. He applied for some monetary support to study them, but before it materialized he left for Poona.

In 1951, Desai joined Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute at Poona. As mentioned earlier, every five years, a committee evaluated the teachers as well as the institute on the basis of research done there. Those teachers who could not produce research had to leave the institute. Desai was aware of the requirement that he had to do
research, but he had a problem in deciding the area of research. At that time Poona University had started a new experiment by organizing centralized undergraduate teaching. In centralized teaching, lectures were held at one college and competent teachers in their own field from different subjects were to teach the students at one place. There was a controversy about the new arrangement of teaching. Desai decided to study this problem, which involved the public, the students, and the teachers. He was interested particularly in studying the problems of college students. As the research progressed, the difficulties started for Desai. He faced the problem of questionnaire and sampling. He was aware of the loopholes in his study and accepted them. To quote Desai, “I began to experience the real difficulties due to my ignorance of techniques regarding sampling, questionnaire making, tabulation and calculation, as I began to process my data. There were about 600 questionnaires. What does one do with all that data of good, bad and indifferent quality? I did not tabulate the data in Poona and I brought them with me to Baroda with the hope to work on them some day. That day never came. That was the end of that adventure” (Desai 1981c: 28). He did not complete this research but learnt two main lessons: (1) that respondents do not always speak lies, and (2) that construction of a questionnaire was not an easy task. He also gained confidence to conduct research and found a new field for research, namely, the problems of students.

After this failure of research on college students he selected high school students for his independent research work. He even received financial support from the Institute. This time he knew about sampling and tabulation. Yet, he was not aware of different types of sampling methods, though he was positive about the usefulness of sampling technique. Then, after data collection he had to analyze the data and again his difficulties
started. It was only with the help of a person introduced by his economist friend, that he could do coding. Then Desai himself transferred data from 849 questionnaires on code sheets. The punching and sorting of data was done on machine and the result was available in a short time. He again decoded the sheets and prepared the tables. He then completed his monograph, *High School Students in Poona* (Desai 1953).

In this monograph he raised the issues of 'relevance' and 'theory'. Theory was understood as something to be arrived at and not to be articulated. Regarding theory he wrote, "Today, they are articulated" (Desai 1981b: 202). He believed that he followed the general principles of science in his research. Thus, he said that he followed the general rules of reasoning, which he called scientific attitude. "It is a mental discipline which might be called scientific attitude. My opinion now is that modern technology of research combined with this attitude will give better results" (Desai 1981b: 202). At the end of this monograph he raised the question about the questionnaire method as the chief method of sociological research. He also raised the question about the relevance of particular research. He believed that you arrive at a theory at the end of your analysis but you do not articulate a theory. You also do not create it by putting meaningful words together. Thus, it seems, being an empiricist he preferred inductive logic to formulate a theory rather than deductive logic. Regarding relevance of research he said that it was not necessary to find any relevance of a research work in those days. He believed that he followed the general principles of science in his research because he was sure of what he wanted to observe, and he observed it clearly and precisely. Conclusions followed from facts and he took care to see that no biases influenced the interpretation of facts. Thereby he had also followed the general rules of reasoning.
Desai joined the M. S. University of Baroda in 1952 and completed the writing of his monograph on *High School Students in Poona* in 1953, which was published by Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Poona. While in Baroda, Desai came in contact with literature on American Sociology, perhaps due to his friendship with M. S. Gore who studied at Columbia University, New York. He introduced Parsons’ well known book, *Towards a General Theory of Action* and Merton’s *Social Theory and Social Structure* in post-graduate teaching. Thus, Desai was getting acquainted with new developments in American Sociology, and the students in Baroda Department were exposed to both American Sociology as well as British Social Anthropology. M. N. Srinivas represented the latter in the Department.

While in Baroda, Desai received a large grant from Rockefeller Foundation to study some aspects of social life in Mahuva. Some of the results were published in a book entitled, *Some Aspects of Family in Mahuva* (Desai 1964a). As usual, he was overwhelmed by the data he had collected on Mahuva. However, his study of high school students in Poona and his study of family in Mahuva, both differed in terms of quality and relevance. He became more precise when he wrote about family in Mahuva and he had properly defined all terms and categories. Here he dealt with jointness as a sentiment that exists between relatives, irrespective of the type of household or type of family or a property-holding group. He had used the American sociologist Talcot Parsons’ theory of action to distinguish jointness from nuclearity. Nevertheless, Desai’s both studies, the study of high school students in Poona and the study of family in Mahuva were exploratory studies. After the publication of his book on joint family, Desai planned to write another book on the basis of Mahuva study, namely, “Settlement Patterns and
Allied Problems”, but unfortunately all his data were washed away in the flood of the Tapi River in 1968. At that time I. P. Desai lived in a house just on the bank of the river.

Desai used to visit his native village in Surat District in Gujarat during every vacation and could observe changes taking place in it. During his student days the village was very lively, particularly the Desai’s locality, which he identified as his ‘village’. He went to the village in every vacation when he was studying at Surat in school, and in college at Bombay. He continued this practice later when he was working in the M. S. University of Baroda. Thus he observed changes coming in the village and he undertook the study of this village, which resulted in the publication of a book, The Patterns of Migration and Occupation in a South Gujarat Village, in 1964. It was published by the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Poona.

When I. P. Desai joined the Department in Baroda, he brought with him an approach to sociology, which was in certain respects different from the approach of M. N. Srinivas who was already in a senior and a commanding position. Srinivas represented the strong tradition of social anthropology with its distinctive theoretical thinking and research methodology. He had brought with him from Oxford the theoretical thinking of Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard, and the emphasis on fieldwork method. I. P. Desai brought with him the theoretical thinking of American sociologists such as Parsons and Merton and an emphasis on the method of survey and questionnaire, in addition to his old influence of Marx. From all accounts we get, there was considerable tension between the two stalwarts due to their theoretical and methodological thoughts.
Nevertheless, they were complementary to each other in certain respects. Both were strongly empirical and both were committed to the growth of Sociology in India.

To understand the development of sociology in India, it is necessary to know something about the second and third generation sociologists, particularly because I. P. Desai belonged to the second generation. They have been in important positions in most universities in India, so their thinking influenced the sociological trends in India. Thus, it becomes necessary to know what sociology has taught them.

The wide variety in outlook and thinking of sociologists in India can be related to two main factors: (1) many went abroad for training to different places and thus they contributed to the variety in outlook and thinking, and (2) the number of scholars had increased and therefore there were varieties in thinking and outlook. Those who went abroad and some of those foreigners who came to India held important positions in India.

This was the time when American Sociology had begun to spread in India through scholars who were trained in USA and held important positions in Indian universities. Secondly, many Americans came to India and held positions as advisors or consultants in the government and in the Foundations. They gave funds for research and also provided job opportunities. The Government also wanted people who were trained in American methods (statistical methods) and who were trained to work in a team. Thus new developments in American Sociology came to spread in India (Desai 1981c: 45).

The number of Departments of Sociology as well as sociologists was growing and it is visible in the establishment of Indian Sociological Society, and its journal
Sociological Bulletin in 1952. After the 1950s, Srinivas introduced a change in the thinking in sociology. He pointed out that under the name of sociology, in fact social philosophy and social work were taught and practiced by and large. Srinivas wanted to make sociology more scientific and value free. I. P. Desai observed “Even when Srinivas participated in the discussion regarding policy or practice-oriented researches his emphasis was always on fundamental theoretical knowledge. He believed that the rest would follow” (Desai 1981b: 247). Srinivas being greatly influenced by British structural-functionalism criticized the evolutionary trend in sociology and emphasized synchronic studies as against diachronic studies. A synchronic study tries to find interrelationships between various parts of a society or between different systems of a society at one point of time, while diachronic study preferred by evolutionary theorists is conducted at two points of time. Srinivas also redefined the field of social anthropology. According to Srinivas, social anthropology could be defined as the study of tribal societies, peasant societies, and even complex societies. A number of American and British scholars came to India and did such studies. Srinivas emphasized fieldwork studies. The new fieldwork studies were meant to test hypotheses and were not just descriptive. The new tradition meant staying in a village for a long time, and also meant a purposive and selective observation. Moreover, it gave the opportunity of opening up new or further points and areas of study. Along with this, Srinivas strongly opposed the use of questionnaire techniques and other statistical methods with a missionary spirit. Desai noted, “What Srinivas was doing and preaching was against everything that I was doing and thinking and all that I had learnt and thought” (Desai 1981b: 247). In short, Srinivas represented British social anthropology and Desai was more inclined towards
newly emerging tradition of American sociology. Until the 1950s, no distinction was made between sociology and social anthropology. But later Srinivas said that social anthropology was the true sociology. While Desai was more inclined to sociological studies based on survey data.

Thus in 1952, when Desai came to Baroda he felt that there were basic differences between him and Srinivas regarding research methods in sociology. Srinivas had begun to express his academic views in this regard. He was holding seminars in which he asked students to do field work. He wrote about fieldwork positively in journals and newspapers and wrote against the questionnaire method. Desai at this time was writing his report on Poona study in which he had used the questionnaire method. Therefore, Desai felt it necessary to clarify his position while writing about methodology in the conclusion of his monograph (Desai 1953) "We reject the extravagant claims made for the questionnaire method as the chief method of sociological research. We believe that questionnaire should be used in close collaboration with field work" (Desai 1981c: 32). This not only reflected the differences of views between Desai and Srinivas, but also reconciling attitude of Desai. He saw the usefulness of statistical data in research, but did not completely reject the importance of fieldwork. Thus though Srinivas and Desai held opposite views about the nature of sociological studies and their research methods, they were complementary to each other.

Desai was influenced by both the sociological and social anthropological trends in Indian Sociology. He learnt about the trends in social anthropology not only from Srinivas but also from his friend David F. Pocock of Oxford University. But he differed
from Srinivas in his understanding of social anthropology. He was also influenced by new developments in American Sociology from the 1950s to 1966.

According to Desai, the first generation sociologists had no concepts, their data were not precise and adequate, and their techniques of data collection were not satisfactory. But later the orientation of sociologists changed under the influence of American Sociology. According to Desai, many were trained in the skill of research in Sociology. An examination of syllabi of different Universities and content of methodology courses organized by ICSSR would prove this. However, Desai often felt that overemphasis on quantitative research methods had created technicians but not scientists. Because, according to him, scientists needed a training of mind along with the training in skill of research (Desai 1981c: 50).

According to R. K. Mukherji (1986: 3), Desai's approach was more critical than that of many others. He distinguished himself by following the principle of induction rather than deduction followed by many others. In induction, generalizations are made from particular observations. A hypothesis is formulated from observation of initial cases and then you search for negative examples. On finding that the hypothesis is reformulated to take care of negative examples, the process continues until no negative example is found. Then the generalization is made, and on the basis of the generalization theory is built. In his studies Desai generally followed the principle of induction.

I. P. Desai always searched for a different and new valuation (explanation) from the prevailing evaluations. This can be seen in his writings on Indian family. He accepted the popular definition of family as a three-generation co-residential unit but did
not stop there. He added a new feature, namely, kinship network of family units. Thus, he gave a different explanation of joint family than the popular one. However, he did not explain the paradox of the existence of extended family in urban areas in developing countries.

In India there has been a controversy about developing “sociology of India” or “Indian sociology” (Unnithan et. Al. 1965). Those who advocated the case of “sociology of India” believed in following the scientific approach of western sociology to study Indian reality. And those were for “Indian sociology” thought that to study Indian reality we need to develop a conceptual framework rooted in Indian philosophical thoughts. Desai believed in the development of sociology of India.

I. P. Desai was a devoted scholar. He was searching for concepts and methods for unbiased study of reality. For that he followed the general rules of reasoning. For him theory was wider application to human society to show its changes from one stage to another (1981c: 32, 47). He criticized D. P. Mukherji’s presidential address to the first all-India Sociological Conference in 1955 in which he expressed his wish to develop the Indian science of sociology.

Desai was neither a dogmatist nor a doctrinaire. Therefore, he could appraise reality undoubtedly and comprehensively in his later life. This is seen in his writings on elites and relevance of caste in understanding social reality. As a true scientist he had doubts, which he clarified in the course of appraising reality. He rejected other scholars’ views about caste that viewed it as a unique persistent phenomenon in Indian society. As regards the controversy on Backward classes, he suggested that backwardness in India
could not be identified on the basis of caste. He said that backwardness could be identified in people whose life chances are bleak irrespective of their caste and religion. He identified a socially and educationally backward class in India on the basis of occupation. According to Desai, an objective valuation of subjective valuations was needed. Having realized this much earlier, he referred to the state of sociology in India in his article (Desai 1981b), in which he pointed out that in the 1950s there was a strong tendency to state that a person belonged to a particular school of thought and accused others as being dogmatic. Scholars of different schools differed in their descriptions and explanations of Indian society. For example, in describing what Indian society was, how and why it operated in a particular manner, and what it was likely to be in near future, a Marxist sociologist and an empiricist would study the same social reality but differ in their valuations.

Thus, in India different scholars differ in their valuations, and therefore, there are different trends in Indian Sociology. But these trends cannot give us a precise, undoubted, and comprehensive appraisal of Indian social reality. So, Indian sociology mostly consists of value specific appraisals of Indian social reality. But to arrive at precise, unequivocal, and comprehensive appraisal of Indian reality, you need to move beyond value specific appraisals. The sociology of India develops on the basis of induction and inference and it tests the efficacy of different valuations of social reality. Thus, Desai distinguished between ‘Indian Sociology’ and ‘Sociology of India’. In this context, we can say that Desai worked only for the development of sociology of India. In 1978 in his presidential address to the 14th All India Sociological Conference, he gave the concept of “Desired Type of Society” to provide a direction to research in India.
Mukherjee shows (1986: 14) that Desai explored the cardinal valuation by following rules, and in that context he referred to the valuations of ordinal valuation on the basis of induction and inference. Throughout his life he pursued the task of judging the judgments on the basis of induction and inference and pointed out a distinguished feature of reality, namely, the old and the new, which referred to culture and society. Thus he distinguished culture and society in terms of old and new.

He distinguished culture from society in his article “Understanding Occupational Change in India” (Desai 1971c). He did not specify the nature of interaction between culture and society. He did not believe that culture and society play an equal role in bringing about change in society. In consonance with sociological approach, as opposed to anthropological approach, he also did not accept that culture plays as the prime lever in social change. According to Desai, society changes due to social products and processes, while cultural products and processes intervene in the course of change. He gave the example of westernisation affecting social change in India through the process of culture contact. He specified that contact does not initiate change. But if contact is compatible with change, then it may push ahead the change. Change arises out of internal developments in a society. Here again we can see Desai’s preference for sociological approach as against the anthropological approach, which often gives primacy to culture.

However, the intervening role of culture was demonstrated in his writings on caste. Desai’s comprehension of backwardness in Indian society demonstrated that: (1) caste was a product of culture, and not a social product, (2) caste relations and behaviour represented a culture process and not a social process, (3) the newly emerged and
emergent social products were not identified as playing independent role, and (4) caste plays an intervening role through state wide and nationwide caste associations. But the understanding of reality was concealed when caste was seen as playing an independent role in the course of social change.

Mukherji brought out Desai's dedication to his profession. Mukherji (1986: 17) said that as long as sociology is treated as a science of society and not an esoteric venture imposed from anywhere, Desai would continue to live. This was Desai's contribution to development of sociology of India, according to Mukherji.

M. N. Srinivas and I. P. Desai remained friends to the end, though Desai often expressed his dislike of the kind of work Srinivas was doing. Srinivas wrote in his foreword, "All in all, we disagreed on many matters but that did not affect our personal relations" (Srinivas 1988: x). Desai did not agree with Srinivas' overemphasis on fieldwork, structural-functional approach, and culture. And Srinivas did not approve of the questionnaire method of Desai. However, despite this, Desai occasionally used the logic of structural-functional approach in his analysis and also accepted the importance of fieldwork, which speaks about his intellectual openness.

Concluding Remarks

Thus, I. P. Desai's academic life can be divided into five phases: (1) Bombay phase, (2) Bhavnagar phase, (3) Poona phase, (4) Baroda phase, and (5) Surat phase. The first phase of his academic life at Bombay was mainly associated with higher studies. At Bombay, he obtained B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. Degrees in sociology, and thus achieved
highest academic qualifications. During the second phase of his academic life he taught at Samaldas College at Bhavnagar. Here he taught two subjects at undergraduate level, Economics and Sociology. Here he gained teaching experience but his basic inclination was towards research. Hence he decided to study Padhars, a tribe in Bhavnagar region. He realized that teaching and research called for different orientations and expressed that merely classroom teaching no way equipped him to do research. He left Bhavnagar to join the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute in Poona. During this phase, he had freedom and choice to conduct research in the field of his interest. Here he gained postgraduate teaching experience. He attempted to undertake his first independent research at this institute in Poona. He completed his first research on high school students in Poona and thus pioneered a new field of research in sociology, viz., the Sociology of Education. Thus this phase was significant in terms of both research and teaching. In 1952, he left Poona to join the Department of Sociology in the Faculty of Arts, M. S. University of Baroda. This phase was characterized by teaching and research. In Baroda, he undertook a major research project on family in Mahuva and another on migration. He selected his native village, Parujan, for his research on migration. On the basis of these researches he published two books (Desai 1964a, 1964b). Apart from this he was also involved in a nation wide research project on education along with M. S. Gore and Suma Chitnis, which was funded by ICSSR. He guided six students for Ph. D. research. Thus the Baroda Phase was academically both a rewarding and challenging phase for I. P. Desai. It was challenging because two great sociologists with different outlooks and views worked together as colleagues in Baroda department. This phase was also a phase of tension for him. In 1966, he took premature retirement and settled in Surat. He
founded the Center for Social Studies in Surat. At this center, he conducted researches in the fields of sociology of tribe, caste, untouchability and social movement. Thus he was initiated into research at Poona, his research blossomed at Baroda, and it continued to blossom till he died in January 1985.

I. P. Desai in the Eyes of Other Scholars

According to Gore (1985), Desai distinguished himself in his ability to establish personal friendship irrespective of the age factor. His students loved him. He got more interested in the problems and issues of the Harijans and the Tribals after he started the research centre at Surat. However, Narayan Sheth (Sheth 1985) observes that the research centre at Surat was started with the aim to study the socio-economic inequality of the Dalit class and make attempt to reduce it. Thus his interest in the problems of Untouchables and Tribals was in tune with the aim of the research centre. Sheth even said that the Surat Centre is the symbol of Desai’s intellectual and physical labour. Desai never compromised with his values, which made him resign from important positions at times. For example, he resigned from the Deanship of the Faculty of Arts in Baroda University and relinquished membership of the University Syndicate due to his differences of opinions with university authorities. Thus he would not hesitate to leave the position if it clashed with his values. Tara Patel (1985) also said the same thing about Desai. Desai would not give up if he felt that he was correct and right. When she met him first in 1953, she got an impression that he looked like a schoolteacher wearing dhoti, shirt, and long coat. He wore traditional Indian dress. But later her respect for Desai as a sociologist grew as she came to know him intimately.
According to Ghanshyam Shah (1985a: 10), I. P. Desai was both mentally and physically fit till the end. Desai was influenced by Marxism, when he was studying in Surat. He was a strong critique of educated middle class people working in the universities. He believed that the middle class has no ideology; it does not understand the problems of Indian society. He believed that the western educated class among the middle class that called itself modern, was supporting capitalism. His belief in Marxism led him to emphasize on economic aspects of Indian society. He was an Indian from many angles; such as his dress, in his relationship with others, his style of thinking as well as writing, everything was Indian. Harbans Patel (1985), a Ph.D. student of Desai, said that he liked activists more than the academicians. Kriss Bux (1985), a research student from Netherlands, said that Desai’s ideas would continue to live forever through the Centre for Social Studies. It took a long time for him to understand Desai’s nature. He used to be rough and tough in his speech and therefore for a new student it took long a time to understand him. Kriss Bux further said that it took quite a long time for him to understand Desai, his advise and its significance, his style of teaching etc. Desai taught that the concepts of socialism, modernization and equality should be used after proper thinking. Towards the end of his research, their relationship developed so close that Kriss Bux began to consider him as an elderly respectable member of his family. Desai’s students from Bhavnagar fondly remember that in Bhavnagar, he used to play volleyball, table tennis and cricket with them. This he continued even at Baroda. According to Narhari Thacker (1985: 26a), office-assistant in the Centre, Desai used to influence people through his speech, ideas, and behaviour. He was very calculative and cared for a single pie spent in the Centre. However, whenever the Centre or its staff was in difficulty
he used to make arrangement from his personal fund and in many cases he did not receive
the money back. A. M. Shah wrote about Desai in his Preface; “He was extremely
affectionate throughout. It [joint authorship] was for me a great finale to a relationship
spanning more than thirty-two years. It has been a pleasure and privilege to have been
associated with IP as teacher, colleague, and man” (Shah, A. M. 1988: xvi). Thus Desai’s
friends, colleagues, and students all have admired different aspects of Desai’s academic
and personal life.

In the following chapters I shall discuss in detail Desai’s publications on different
topics, and in the last chapter will again analyze the various phases of his academic life,
his views, and ideas in the light of his writings as well as the academic environment in
which he studied and grew as a professional. I shall also attempt to analyse the
relationship between I. P. Desai and M. N. Srinivas who were co-students at Bombay,
colleagues at M. S. University of Baroda, and who remained close friends throughout
their life irrespective of their academic differences. There is no doubt that in Desai we get
a combination of love and discipline, concern for others, and readiness to help others in
times of need, a strict but loving teacher, and a scholar with firm beliefs and ideas about
various issues of Indian society.