

History of Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC)

Early History of Surat

1.Ancient and Medieval Origins

Surat has a rich and continuous history that dates back several centuries. The city is located on the banks of the Tapi River, close to the Arabian Sea, which made it an ideal place for early settlement and trade. Historical records suggest that Surat was known by names such as Suryapur and Sourashtra in ancient times. Its geographical position allowed easy access to both inland regions and overseas routes, helping it grow steadily as a trading town.

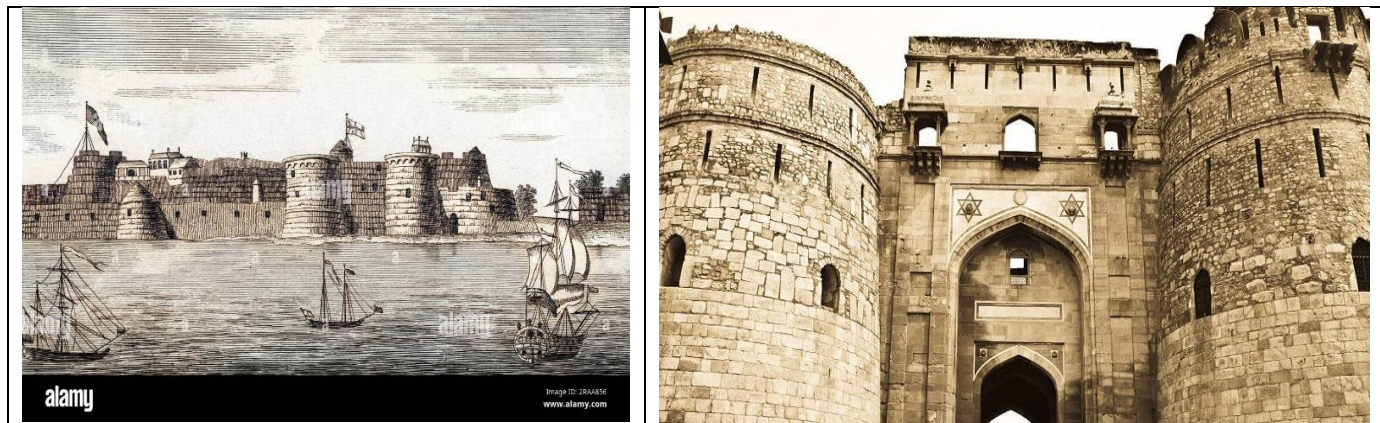
From early periods, Surat was involved in the exchange of goods such as spices, cotton, silk, and precious stones. Merchants from different parts of India and foreign lands visited the city, making it an important commercial center.



2.Surat During the Mughal Period

Surat reached its peak during the Mughal era, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries. Under Mughal rule, Surat became the principal port of western India. It was widely known as the “Gateway to Mecca” because pilgrims traveling for Haj would depart from Surat’s port.

The city attracted traders, bankers, scholars, and skilled artisans. Wealthy merchant communities such as Parsis, Bohras, Jains, and Muslims settled in Surat and contributed to its economic and cultural growth. The city witnessed the construction of grand havelis, markets, mosques, and gardens, reflecting its prosperity and importance.



3. European Influence and Trade

With the arrival of European powers including the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British, Surat became a center of international trade. The British East India Company established its first factory in Surat in the early 17th century. European involvement increased commercial activity but also brought political competition and administrative changes.

Despite changes in power and occasional conflicts, Surat remained a major center for textile production, shipbuilding, and overseas trade for many decades.



4. Decline and Transition

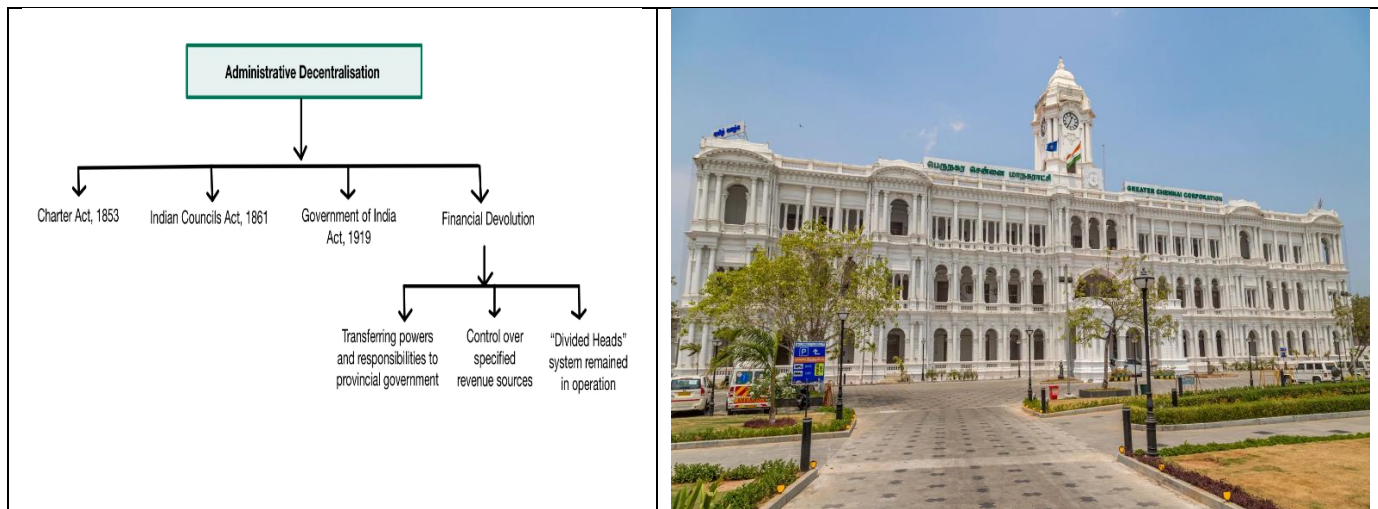
By the late 18th century, Surat began to lose its importance as a port due to the silting of the Tapi River and the rise of Bombay as a major harbor. However, the city continued to be significant for regional trade, textiles, and craftsmanship. As the population increased, civic issues such as sanitation, water supply, roads, and public health became more prominent, creating the need for organized local governance.



5. Formation of Municipal Administration During British Rule

The Surat Municipal Corporation was originally established in 1852 during British rule under the Bombay Municipal Act. This made it one of the oldest municipal bodies in India. In its early years, the municipal administration mainly focused on street cleaning, drainage, maintenance of markets, public health, and tax collection.

Limited resources and rapid population growth posed challenges, but the establishment of a municipal body marked an important step toward organized urban management.



5.Challenges in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century

During this period, Surat faced several serious challenges including plague outbreaks, floods caused by the Tapi River, overcrowding, and poor sanitation. These problems exposed weaknesses in urban infrastructure and highlighted the importance of strengthening municipal systems.

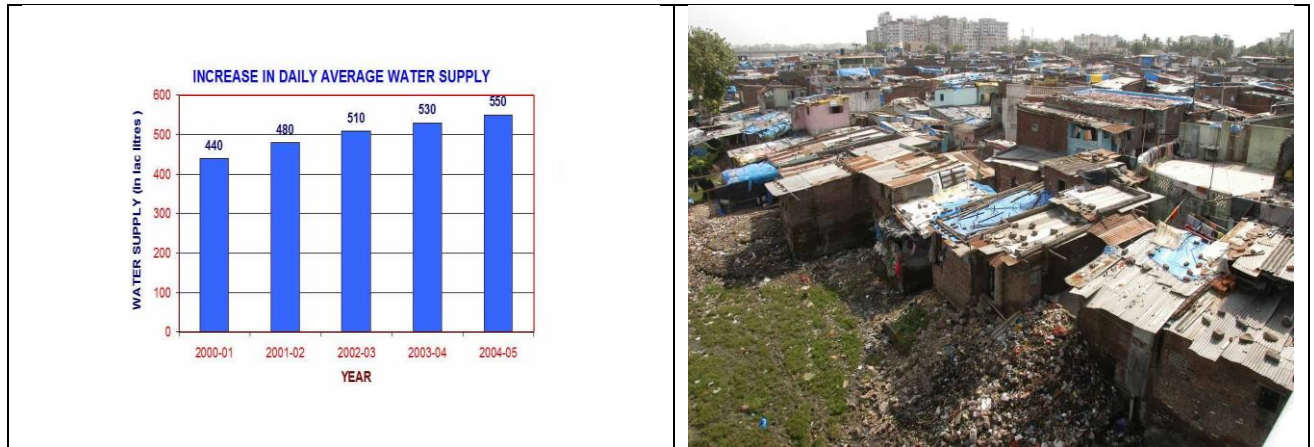
Gradual improvements were made in drainage networks, waste disposal methods, and public health measures, helping the city cope with recurring crises.



6.Post-Independence Development After 1947

After India gained independence in 1947, Surat entered a new phase of development. The municipal administration expanded its responsibilities to meet the needs of a growing city. Planned urban development, public welfare, and infrastructure improvement became major priorities.

SMC began focusing more on water supply, road construction, healthcare services, primary education, and housing facilities.



7. Formation as a Municipal Corporation in 1966

In 1966, Surat was officially declared a Municipal Corporation. This provided the civic body with greater administrative and financial powers. A structured system was introduced with elected corporators, standing committees, and a Municipal Commissioner as the executive authority.

This change enabled faster decision-making and more effective implementation of development projects across the city.



8. Rapid Urban and Industrial Growth

From the 1980s onward, Surat experienced rapid industrial growth, especially in diamond polishing and textile manufacturing. This led to a sharp increase in population due to migration from different parts of India.

To manage this growth, SMC developed new water treatment plants, expanded sewage systems, improved road networks, constructed bridges and flyovers, and introduced organized solid waste management systems.

9. The Plague Crisis of 1994

The plague outbreak of 1994 became a major turning point in the history of Surat Municipal Corporation. The crisis brought national and international attention and exposed serious shortcomings in urban sanitation and governance.

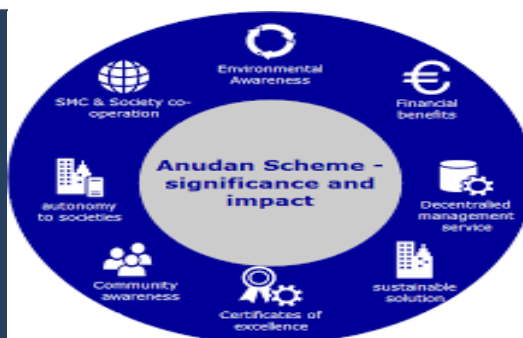
In response, SMC carried out major reforms, including strict cleanliness drives, improved accountability of officials, modern waste management techniques, and better use of technology. These reforms transformed Surat into one of the cleanest cities in India.



10.Modernization and Smart Governance

In the 21st century, SMC adopted modern governance practices. These included e-governance services, online payment systems, advanced flood control mechanisms, disaster management planning, and participation in the Smart City Mission.

The corporation also focused on sustainability, environmental protection, and citizen-friendly services.



11.Present Role of Surat Municipal Corporation

The Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC) functions as the primary local governing body responsible for urban planning, infrastructure development, and essential civic services for over 5.5 million residents. It focuses on transforming Surat into a smart, sustainable city through water supply, waste management, road maintenance, public health, and digital governance initiatives.

Key Roles and Responsibilities of SMC:

- **Infrastructure & Utilities:** Managing water supply, underground sewage systems, all-weather roads, and solid waste management.
- **Smart City Initiatives:** Implementing technology-driven solutions (retrofitting) in areas like Udhna, Parvat-Magob, and Dumbhal for energy efficiency, smart street lighting, and improved sanitation.

- Urban Planning & Development: Overseeing city growth, slum rehabilitation, and offering alternative accommodation.
- Public Health & Safety: Providing tertiary level healthcare services, fire services, and maintaining a clean environment.
- Digital Governance: Operating 18 City Civic Centres for fast, transparent services and utilizing a GIS portal for administrative decision-making.
- Cultural & Education Support: Managing municipal schools, public libraries, and organizing city-wide cultural events.



