

Demographic and Socio-economic Challenges of Parsis in Contemporary India

Shalini Bharat

Former Vice Chancellor Tata Institute of Social Sciences

MoMA : National Seminar on Parsis in Modern India

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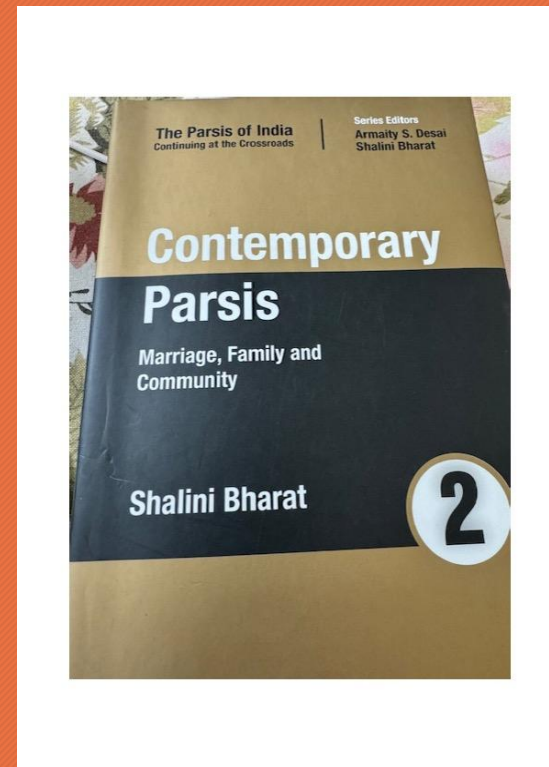
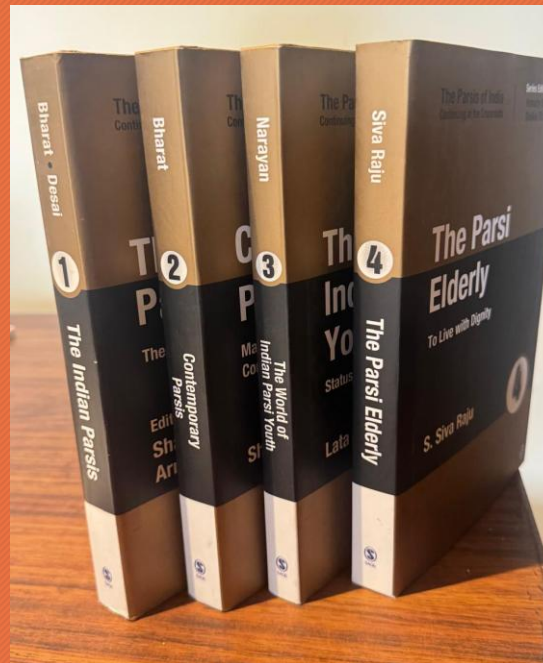
Parsis- the tiniest part of a billion plus India

Parsis constitute 0.0047% of India's population (Census, 2011)

'TISS 'PARSI Project' - A 4 -volume series: The Parsis of India: Continuing at the Crossroads, SAGE 2017 -Co_editors A.S Desai & S. Bharat (N= 2911)



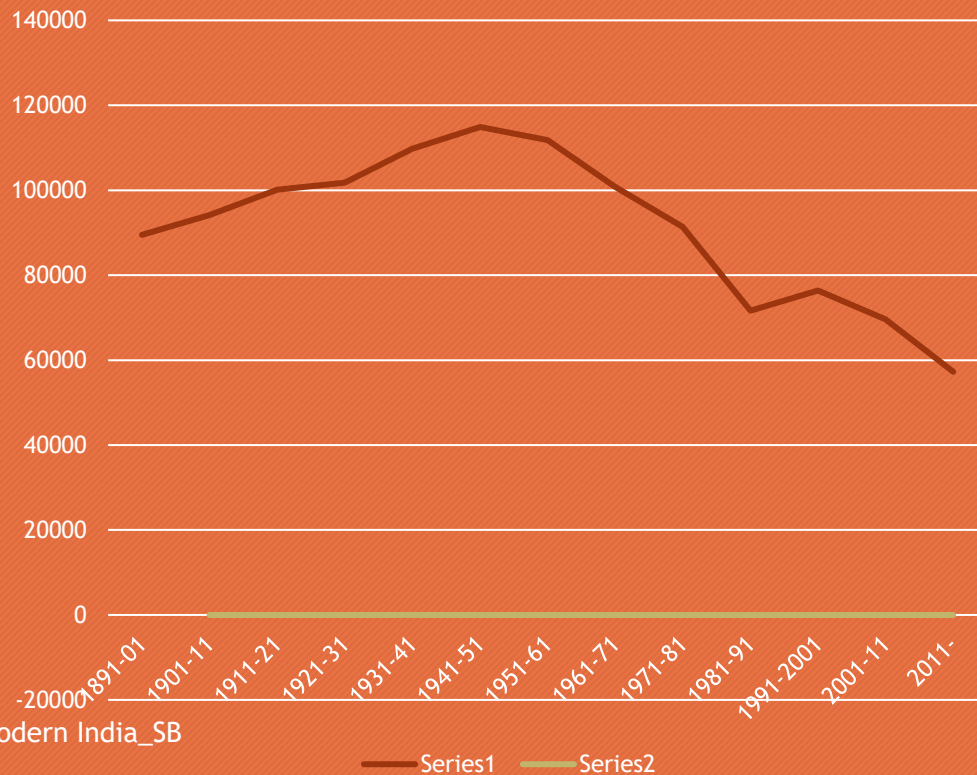
Dr. Armaity S. Desai
Former Director, TISS
Former Chairperson, UGC



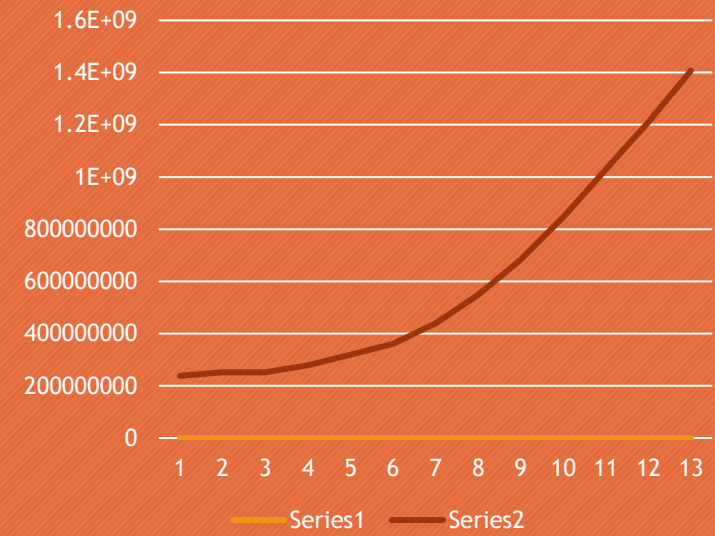
Parsis of India - a community that grew in socio-economic-political prominence in India but shrank in size over last eight decades

Decade	Population	Decline in %
1891-01	89490	
1901-11	94140	5.2
1911-21	100096	6.33
1921-31	101778	1.68
1931-41	109752	7.83
1941-51	114890	4.68
1951-61	111791	-2.7
1961-71	100772	-9.86
1971-81	91378	-9.32
1981-91	71630	-21.61
1991-2001	76382	6.63
2001-11	69601	-8.88
2011-	57264	-17.72

Parsi Demography 1891-2011



India's population 1901-2021



What describes the Parsi community?

- Important demographic trends and socio-cultural norms

- Fewer marriages/ higher singlehood
- Delayed marriages
- Low marital fertility
- Voluntary childlessness
- Higher death rate/lower birth rate (BMC data 2013 - 756 D/174 B)
- Non-proselytizing religion
- Endogamous marriage patterns
- Practice of cousin marriage -But trends show declining interest
- Non-acceptance of inter-married Parsi women/ progeny

Mean age at marriage: Parsis & Rest of India

Parsi women marry 7 yrs later, and Parsi Men 6 yrs later compared to non-Parsis

year	Parsi Female	Parsi M	Year	India F	India M
1881	15-19 yrs				
1890	16-20 yrs				
1901	24.3 yrs		1901-11	12.8 yrs	20.4 yrs
1961	27.0	31.1	1961	15.9	21.3
1982	27.1	30.1	1982	18.4	23.5
1999	26.8	30.6	1999	19.7	24.9
2006*	28.0	31.0	2005-06 NFHS 3	17.2	22.6
2007*	27	30	2007 DLHS Mumbai	22.2	
2008*	30	33	2007 DLHS Mum subu	21.7	
			2020 NSSO India	25.3	28.0 (26.7 All India)

Trends in Never Married status of Parsi Women/and Women of Bombay & All India

Year	Age bracket	% Nev Marr Parsi F	% Single F -Ind Age 25-29	% Nev Mar F of Bombay (All India) Age 40+
1962 (Sp census, RGI, 71)	40-44	20.1	1961- 1.9%	3.3
	45-49	18.4		2.5
1973 (Axelrod, 1990)	31-45	27	1971- 2.3	5.3% over 25 years All India Census 2001 6.4% over 25 yrs All India Census 2011
	46-60	18		
	60+	16		
1980s (Karkal, 1984)	40+	38 (44.8% Men)	1981- 3.3	0.6 (45+F) India NFHS3, 07
1931 cens Visaria'74	45-49	10	1991- 4.2	1.0 (45+ Men) NFHS 3
1961 cens (Visaria)	45-49	18	1992-93- 4.7	0.2% (45+ F) - Maha NFHS 3
1971 cens (Visaria)	45-49	17		0.7% (45+M) - Maha NFHS 3
1999 (Singh DP 2000)	40-70	10-15% (15-21% Parsi M) Greater Bombay Parsis		

Summing up Parsi (non)-marriage trends

- Between 1901- 1941 - unmarried Parsi pop of Bombay increased by 40% while % of married declined by 35%
- 1971 census - 15.4% women/18.6% men above 50 yrs never marr
- Over last 7 decades 18 -25% of Parsis remained single beyond age 45
- Parsis married later than Rest of India (in 1962 mean marriage age for Parsi women was 26.5/ for men 31.4 / for other Indians 15.9 & 21.3) - a delay of nearly 9-10 yrs
- **Higher mean age at marriage** - Loss of critical child bearing opportunities/ undetected infertility/ small reproductive base/ other unintended effects -larger inter-gen gap

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Parsi Fertility: Early signs of declining trends

The fall in ratio of Parsi population to total Bombay population began by the beginning of 20th century (1906)

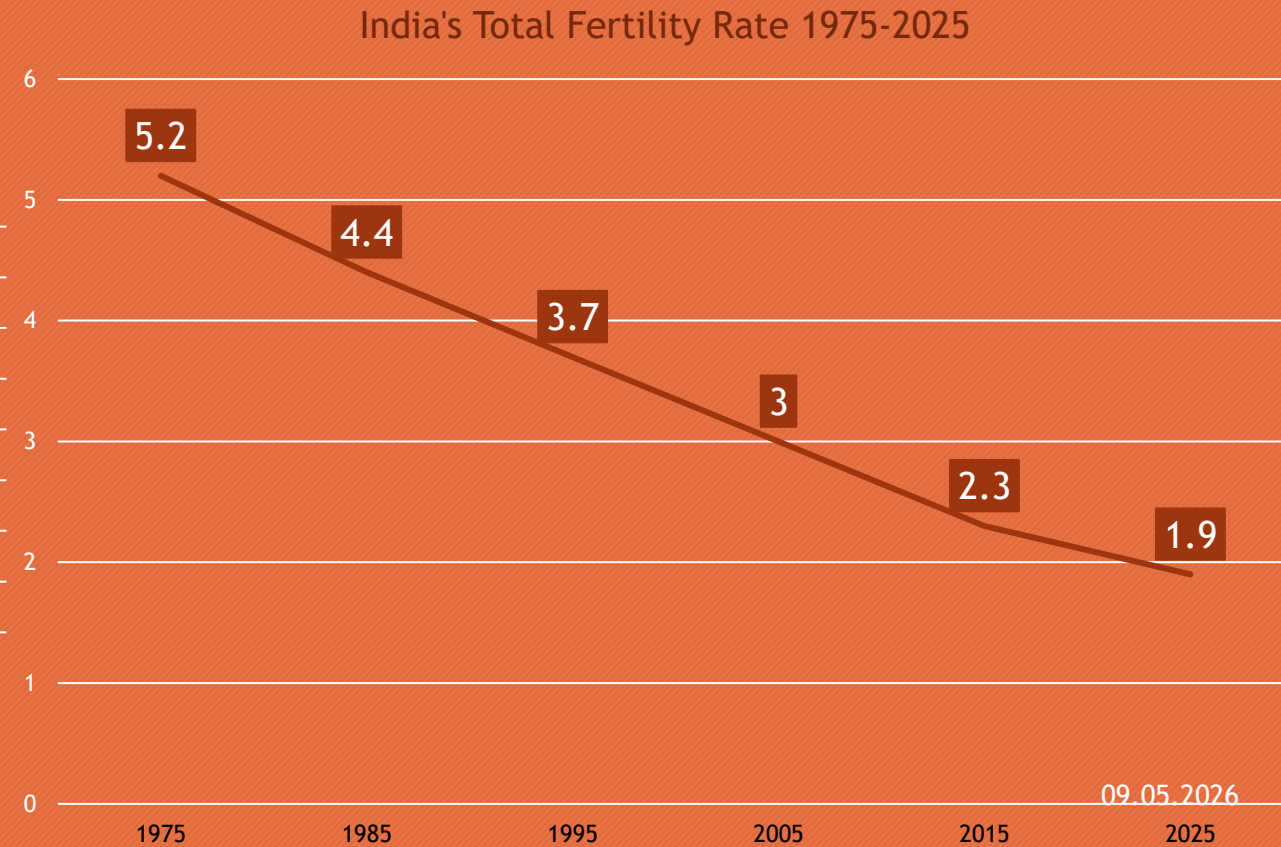
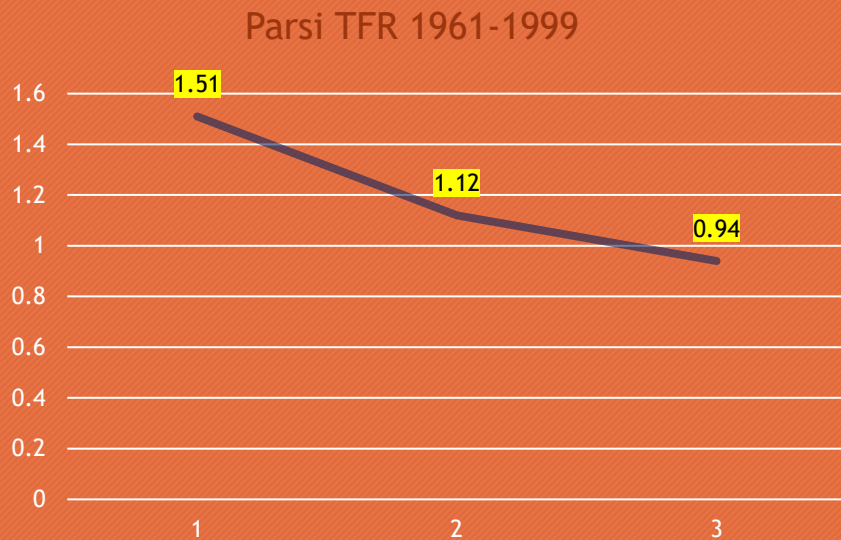
Bombay Parsi population decline thus predates the population decline challenges faced by European societies which began around 1980s

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Year	% of Parsi pop to Bombay's total pop
1872	6.8
1906	4.9 0.0047% of India's pop (2011)

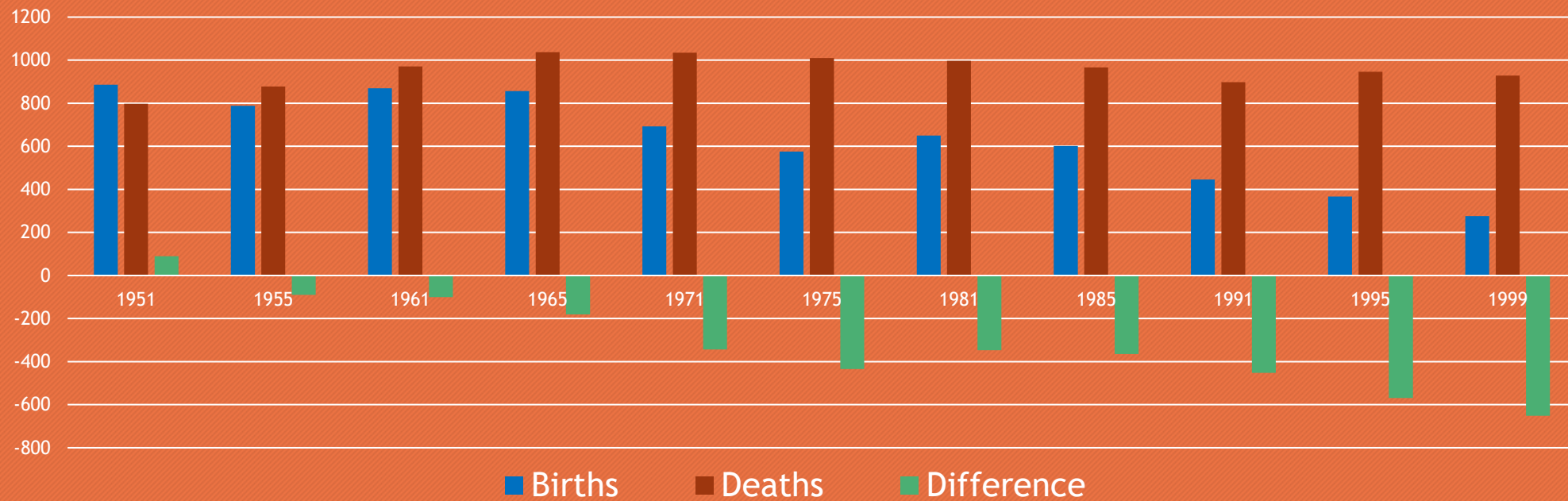
Year	Children (0-4) per 1000 Women (15-44/49)	
	Parsi Women	Non-Parsi Women
1901	335	
1921	255	
1961	182	659 (1982- 545)
1999	134	211

Parsi Fertility: below replacement level; India now matches this level



An inverted population pyramid: More deaths than births

Trends in Parsi Births & Deaths 1951-1999 (Singh, 2010)



Can the Parsi demographic decline halt?

- **First Projection** (Chandrashekhar (1948))
- By 2001 - 89,218
- But, 2001 census - 69,601 ↓
- **Second Projection** (Unisa et al., 2008)
- Continuing depletion till 2051
- **However, pace of depletion may reduce IF**
- A) TFR increases to 1.4 by 2011
- B) TFR increases to 2.1 by 2021/ stays stable thereafter

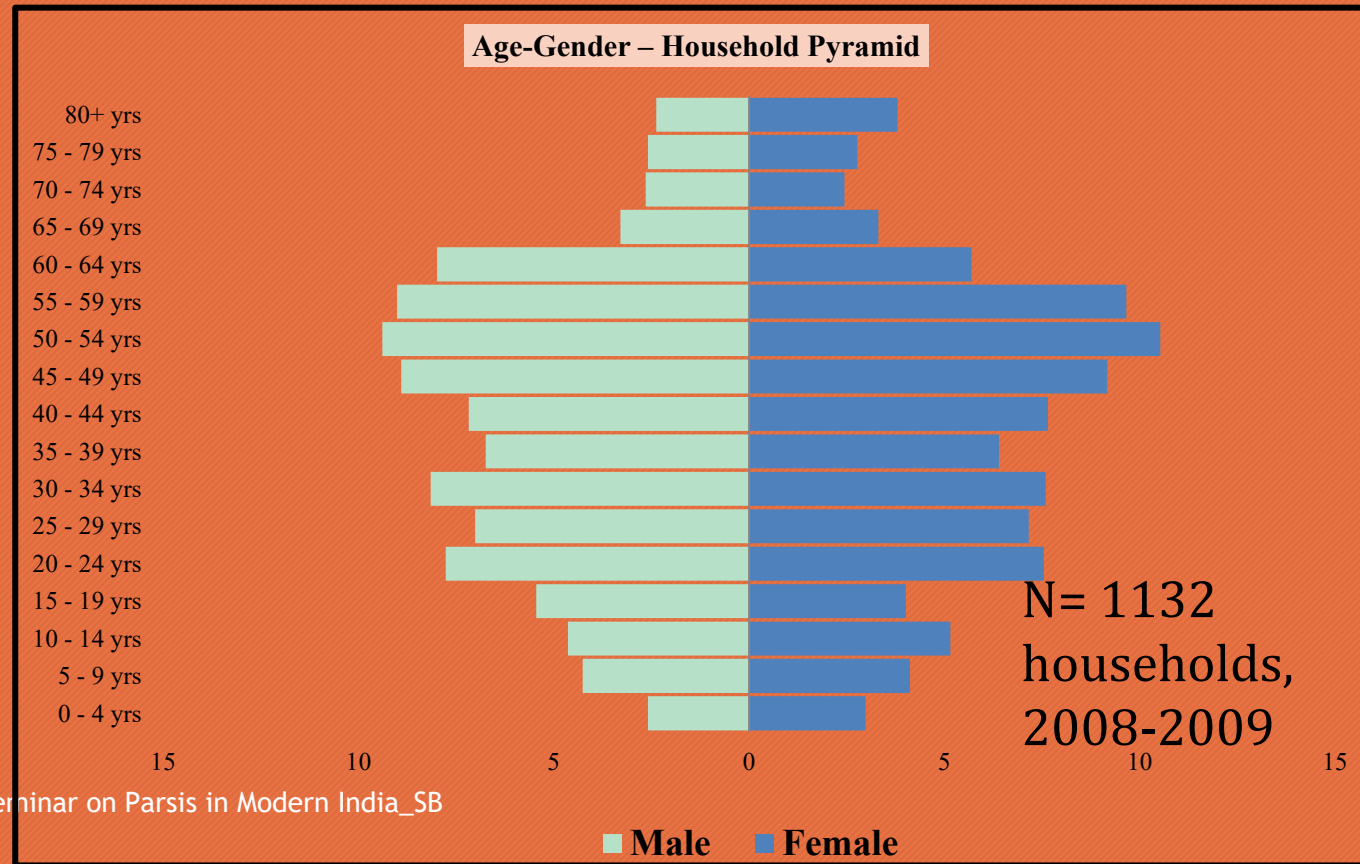
Dem Revival a possibility **IF** both, - % of married Parsis and size of marital fertility increase

Marriage plays a role Parsi demography in cultural context

- India/ South Asia trend - near universality of marriage or higher marriage rates, early age at marriage, arranged marriages
- Live-in relationships are uncommon
- **Marriage and fertility are correlated**: A high percentage of marital unions result in child birth
- Where cohabitation and children born in such unions not the social norm, **marriage becomes a key factor for demographic stability/ revival (unlike in many European countries)**

Parsi households - attitudes and perceptions

N- 1132 respondents pan India (2008-09)



9% single member hhld

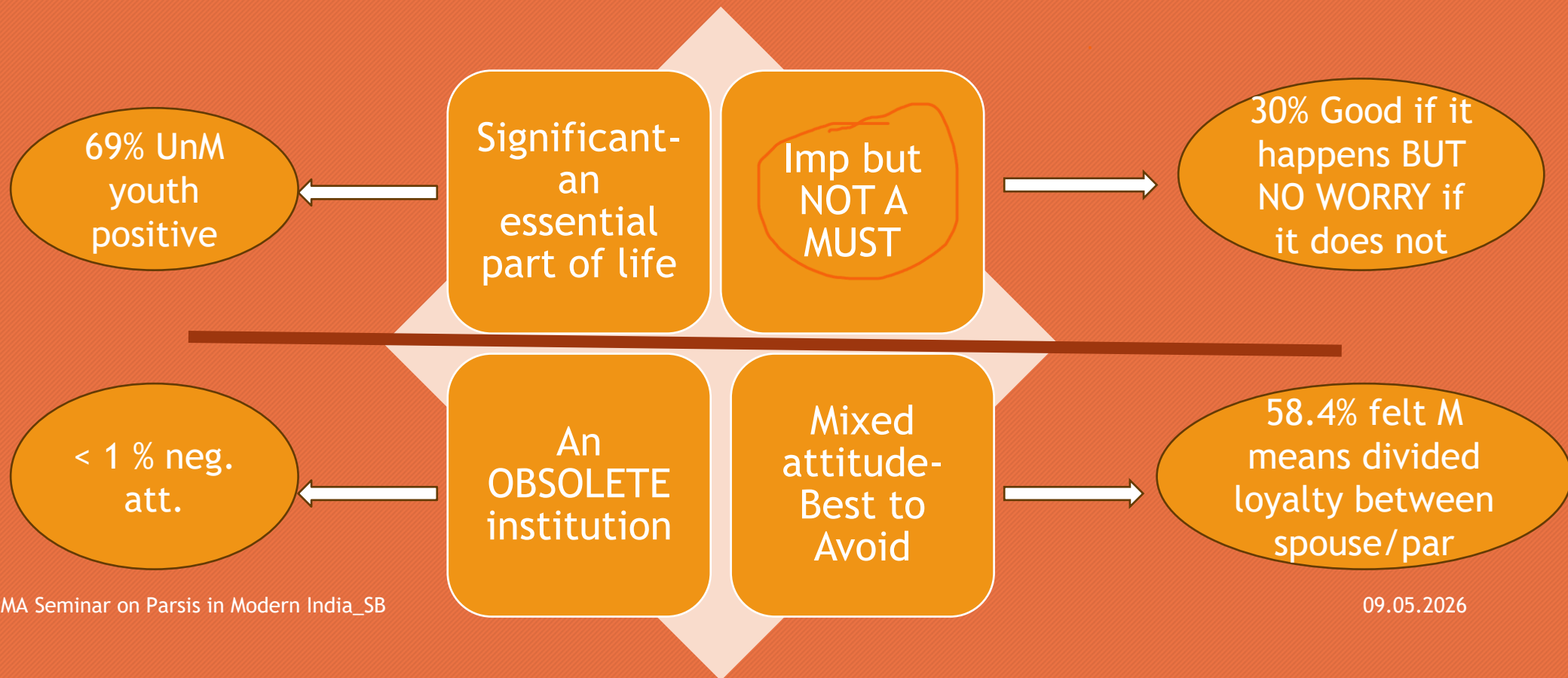
18% - 2 member

Avg hhld size 3.3

More older female

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Significance of Marriage- UnM Youth (20–35 yrs)



Significance of Marriage- UnM youth by gender

Imp of Marriage in one's life	% UnM Female	% UnM Male
Very important and one must marry	64.9	73.1
Only somewhat important because it is good if it happens but no worries if it does not	34.2	26.2
Not at all important	0.9	0.8
SINGLEHOOD - NO STIGMA		

Attitude Towards Live-in Relationships - UnM Youth by gender

- One can have a live-in relationship instead of marriage

	% UnM Female	% UnM Male	% Combined
Completely Agree	19.3	32.8	26.5
Somewhat Agree	26.6	13.6	19.7
Somewhat Disagree	10.1	11.2	10.7
Completely Disagree	44.0	42.4	43.2

} 46.2 (for Agree responses)
 } 53.9% (for Disagree responses)

Practice of & Attitude Towards Cousin Marriage

Strong decline- Finds relatively higher acceptance in rural Gujarat/ lower income gr

Items	% Respondents saying NO
Are your parents related by blood?	89.3
Is any sibling/ first cousin married to blood relative?	80.3
Would you prefer to marry someone related to you by blood?	81.2
Do you recommend consanguinity for your sibling?	85.7
< 5% married respondents reported CM < 10 % reported CM of their parents	
Influence of the majority religion's 'rakhi culture'- "For me it is not natural...I tie rakhi to them..."	

When is a good time to marry?-

One third (29.6%) above age 28 say, its too early to marry

Will marry when I am ready

5 years down the line I am going to be 30. Okay? And at some point in life I'm going to want to be married, it (30 years) might be the best time I think.
Female

Career first, marriage can wait

Marriage is definitely not an issue right now... nor a priority ...I want to get my career started first (Male)

Marriage is really the last thing on my mind right now. I really want to make something of myself (Female)

Marriage not a welcome thought...an intrusion into life goals

I have much to achieve and do...marriage means holding back all that.
Female

When is a good time to marry? Survey findings - No age obsession/ No pressure

- 30% of UnM youth above age 29 - not yet ready for M
- 10% - not yet given any thought to M

Age category Type of respondent	Ideal age of Marr for Parsi males		Ideal age of Marr for Parsi females	
	%Male respondent	%Female respondent	%Male respondent	%Female respondent
< 25 years	3.7	4.4	30.6	15.2
26 - 30 years	55.2 (. . .)	44.2	50.0	58.0 (57%- self)
27 - 35 years	40.3 (67% -for self)	49.5	17.2	24.1
35 - 38 years	0.7	1.9	2.2	2.7
N	134	113	134	112

Reasons for a preferred age for own marriage

- Want to have economic stability, build my career (61%)
- Complete my education first (47.8%)
- Become psychologically mature (33%)

“I will be emotionally independent by then, although my biological clock is ticking...”

- Have a bigger house (13.5%)
- Want to enjoy my freedom (as a single person)
- Have parental/ elderly care responsibilities

Understanding Marriage delays/ Non-marriage

(Single Aged 35-45 yrs/ 46+)

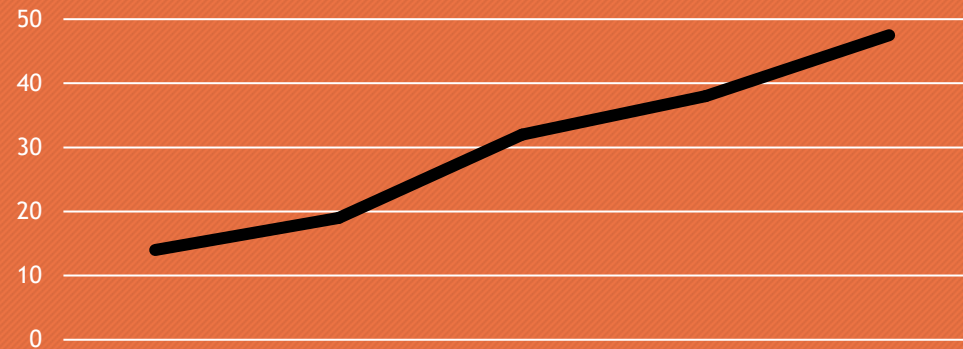
Reasons	Total (%)	Female	Male
Perfect partner search - Time slipped by	35.3	34.8	35.7
Busy with career, had no time for marr	31.4	34.8	28.6
Failed to find a suitable Parsi match	43.1	43.5	42.9
Failed to find any match	13.7	17.4	10.7
Care for elderly parents	15.7	8.7	21.4
Property care resp	3.9	-	7.1
Marrying late is normal among Parsis	27.5	39.1	17.9

Intermarriages - increasing trend

(*based on Parsiana data for Bombay)

- 1987-88 - 14% (Kaka, 1988)
- *1991 - 19%
- *2005- 32%
- *2010- 38% (Shroff & Castro, 2011)
- *2022- 47.5% (Parsiana, 2023)

Trends in Intermarriages -Bombay Parsis,
1987-2022



- Threat of excommunication a strong deterrent for Parsi women-
- **Community's burden of mental health concerns**
- Between 52% & 69% Never Married M/F respondents (46+) favoured marrying out than remaining single

Intermarriages: Inevitable

- For some youth the overwhelmingly non-Parsi environment around them meant that MM are a serious possibility.
- “I cant start liking a person and then stop liking her because she is not a Parsi”
- Two-thirds parents also felt MM are unavoidable for Parsi youth
- On the Attitude to MM scale - UnM youth reported more positive attitude to MM (Guj urban youth most positive)
- 70 % UnM youth disagreed that MM will make Parsi blood impure
- One-third disagreed that MM will destroy ‘Parsipanu’
- Parents in general reported less favorable attitude to MM than youth

The gender dimension of intermarriages - why only his genes matter?

- **‘Equality in gender ends there in Parsi community - intermarried Parsi men get their children’s navjote done ...but not women’**
- Parental acceptance more for intermarried men (66%) than for women (49%)
- Denial of right to worship at Agiary/ do navojote/ claim community resources for self and children/ seek baug residence
- **45% felt excluded/ 33 % felt alienated**
- 90% intermarried women practiced religion/ 15% did children’s Navjote/ 12 % intermarried men did not
- **Threat of ex-communication -a reason for female singlehood - has far reaching mental health consequences**

Purpose of having children

Children are a collective societal good/ ensure continuity into the future

39.4% - 1 child
54.7% - 2 children

5-8% -
miscarriage

Out of 66
childless couples-
44% favoured
unrelated
adoption

Add meaning to
life 82%

Make one feel
complete 74%

Lend emotional
support 73%

Perform last rites
49%

Continue family
lineage 66%

Childlessness
NOT a social stigma

Child bearing
couple's decision

Gap between Ideal/Desired/ Actual number of children “want to give best to the child”

- *Gap between ‘ideal/ desired’ and ‘actual’ num of children - 28% respondents fell short of their desired family size (had fewer children than what they actually desired)*
- *Higher % of Low-income/ lesser edu /younger respondents - ‘1 child is ideal’*
- *Reasons:*
 - *Economic - cost of living, educating, feeding*
 - *Opportunity cost for working women*
 - *Lack of reliable child support*
 - *Lack of housing/ adequate space*

What holds key to reaching demographic stability/ upswing?

- Stop postponing child bearing
- Increase birth size (quantum), and
- Encourage progression to second/ additional child bearing

- For Parsis, additionally, given the Indian cultural context:
- **Marriage**, as the social institution supporting child bearing, holds significance
- Hence, **Marriage**, its timing and reproductive outcome, both are important for arresting Parsi population decline

Demography induced 'Capability Deprivation'

(Rath & Hani 2017)

- Adverse demographic trends have induced '**capability deprivation**' via a skewed age composition
- - single or fewer household members in the working age group
- - low WPR and higher dependency ratio (more children 0-14/elderly 65+ per 100 working age pop of 15-64)
- - three old persons per single child - 'inverted care pyramid'
- - higher ageing population with chronic health, multiple dev issues
- - more female headed households & single females- mental health

Perceived community affluence hides pockets of impoverishment

- A 2009 study of 263 poor households (Rath/Hani, 2017) - U/R-Guj/Maha
- 55% households sought aid from multiple sources
- 62% urban hhlds reported multiple aid (vs 31% rural)
- 80% received monthly maintenance doles (52%)/ or medical aid (18%)
- 85% received aid in cash between Rs100-300/- pm

Around 1/4th households - poor, disabled, dependent, elderly

- Very nominal amounts as doles compel seeking multiple aids
- InEquity in charity -intermarried Parsi women/ cumbersome procedures

To Conclude....

- Three inter-twining factors act upon Parsi demography
 - Event of marriage - its practice and timing
 - Marital fertility - its timing and size
 - Identity politics of ethno-religious community & boundary maintenance
- For a community to survive, new members must be continuously added either by birth, or by entry of outsiders, or both.
- In current traditional Indian context **fertility is tied to marriage**
- Hence, both marriage and marital fertility must be optimal for a community to thrive numerically, especially when ethno-religious identification is strong and boundary maintenance is strict

Thank you!