Chapter VI

Socially Constructing the Dynamics of Intra and Inter Parsi Relationships: An Analytical Framework

In the previous chapter I had given comprehensive account of ethnography, in which emphasis was on religious beliefs and practices from the perspective of community members. In this chapter, I have analyzed the data, in context to the four aims and objectives of the study. This chapter is divided into four sub-sections, pertaining to the aims and objectives. As society is a complex whole where one aspect is dependent on various factors and do not exist independently in isolation, similarly all the sections in entire analysis are related to one another and not analyzed in isolation as independent sections.

Though I had discussed beliefs and practices of the community in the previous chapter, this chapter will also discuss some of them from a different perspective. Each aim/objective is analyzed from the perspective of ‘Believers’, ‘Partial believers’, and ‘Non-believers’.

On the basis of field data I had defined Parsis in terms of believers, partial believers, and non-believers. The distinction between the groups was manifested from ethnographic data. When I say, ‘Believers’, ‘Partial believers’, and ‘Non-believers’, I am talking about individuals and not a family or group. These definitions were based on, their perspective of religion and their involvement in religious practices. These definitions were relative to each other, i.e., when I define believer, it was with respect to partial believers and non-believers. As the belief system of an individual changes over time, similarly the defining criteria changes over time. By this, I mean that an individual, who was a partial believer twenty years ago, might be considered a believer after twenty years because, in comparison to other people, this individual was the one who followed all the norms of the religion. The mobility of people between these groups was very fluid and changed over
time. It is not difficult to find believers and non-believers in the same family and people respected views of family members, within and across generations.

I had also differentiated these groups on the basis of ‘Personal Religion’ and ‘Social Religion’. The difference between personal and social religion was the same as Berger and Luckmann had explained as, ‘my meaning’ and ‘their meaning’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 37). As ‘my meaning’ was personal and belonged to me, ‘their meaning’ was common sense knowledge shared with members of the society. By personal religion I mean the religion one followed as self. It was the religion which belonged to an individual and other individuals were not part of this religion. The decisions the individual takes as a matter of personal religion only affected him. Society has no role to play in those decisions and society would not be directly affected by personal decisions. Though, indirectly personal religion might affect the society. Examples of personal religion were – number of prayers done, intensity with which prayers were done, spirituality, religiosity, etc. By social religion, I mean the aspect of religion one follows as a member of the society. This aspect of religion was shared by members of the society. The religious decisions of an individual affect the society in some manner. Examples of social religion were – decisions relating to the navjote, cremation, visiting Fire Temple, inter-religious marriages, etc. Although marriage was an institution in itself, we should not consider it as part of religion. However, while analyzing the data of the Parsis, marriage decisions were not individual decisions. In many cases they were taken on the basis of religion. Boundary-making and excommunication happened on the basis of marriage decisions, on pretext of religion. Therefore, considering marriage as a ‘social religion’ in context of the Parsis would not be wrong.

I had also used the term ‘community’, especially while discussing marriage issue. By community I mean, Parsis and Iranis. I had included Iranis in this because Parsis and Iranis were considered same community by Parsis and other communities living in Mumbai as both the groups followed the same religion. It is also important to keep in mind that the common Parsi individual does not know much about religion (Page, 99). As Berger and Lurkmann rightly said, “The stock of knowledge is socially (unequally) distributed.” (Ghosh; n.d. 6).
In the following paragraphs, I have defined believers, partial believers, and non-believers.

**Believers** can be identified as individuals who were certain that God existed. There was no doubt in his mind about the existence of God. These people believed that they shared a special relation with God and God would help them in this life and the after life. Their belief on ‘Their God’ was firm and nothing could change it. They did not pray more so that God could help them in materialistic world only. As compared to their fellowmen, they were more conscientious when they prayed, to connect with God. Rituals played important part in their life. They follow all the norms of religion as described by religious texts or religious leaders. They didn’t bend norms of religion as per their convenience. They did not follow norms of religion partially, i.e., they either followed all the norms or none. They did not follow bits and pieces of norms because they did not want to defile religion by following wrong practices. They knew the spiritual aspect of religion and could provide metaphysical reasoning to their actions. In any circumstance, they will not follow other religions. For them, there was no differentiation between the decisions they made regarding personal religion and social religion. They were highly critical of partial believers and non-believers; more than non-believers, they criticized partial believers for defiling religion.

**Partial believers** can be identified as individuals who also believed in God. Though they had no doubt in their mind about existence of God, but they believed in God because others believed in God. They thought that others knew more than they did. If others believed in God, there must be something they did not know because others were not wrong. They were God-fearing and followed the tenets of religion because they believed that if they will fail to do so then God would punish them. On the other hand, if they followed the tenets of religion, God would reward them either in this life or after death. At the time of crisis, they tended to pray more because they believed that God would help them. They amended religious beliefs and practices as per their convenience and found reasons to defend themselves. Their decisions regarding personal religion and social religion differed. For example, an individual might pray like a believer but when it came to marriage, he might take decisions which were against religion. Likewise, an individual might not pray at all but when it came to marriage, he might take a decision in favor of religion. Partial believers could be sub-grouped into two groups, depending on the social
religion they followed. These sub-groups were - orthodox partial believers and reformist partial believers. These sub-groups were based on the discussion in the previous chapter, on the basis of two groups into which Parsis were divided - orthodox and reformists. There was a thin line which differentiated orthodox partial believers and reformist partial believers.

Non-believers can be identified as individuals, who were agnostics and atheists. These people doubted the existence of God but the magnitude of doubt varied. There was a difference between personal religion and social religion. If we consider personal religion, Agnostic individuals believed that there was some supernatural power which controlled them but they were not sure what it was, whereas, Atheist individuals refused to believe in the existence of God. For non-believers, personal religion and social religion could be used interchangeably. By this I mean that they followed the ritualistic practices because they did not want to annoy their loved ones, for example, going to the Fire Temple on Navroz. They did not participate in rituals as a matter of personal will, but as a matter of social obligations. Though, whenever they participated in rituals, they did it as expected by other members of the society. There was no emotional involvement in such participation; it was like a task which they abided with.

The numbers of people in each group differed. There were very few believers and non-believers. Believers and non-believers were like two ends of the spectrum. The maximum number of individuals can be identified as partial believers. In terms of faith, where believers and non-believers could be considered the two extremes, Partial believers were between the two and as per their convenience could adapt either of the two beliefs. In this study I came across four believers, seventy partial believers, and two non-believers.

I had used the theory of “Social Construction of Reality” and “Everyday life” for the purpose of analysis. Before going into the details of this section, I will briefly explain the theory of everyday life. According to Berger and Luckmann, everyday life was taken for granted and was considered as reality by members of the society. This reality originated in thoughts and actions and was maintained as real by them. This world does not require any validation, no one questions it, this world exists and everyone knows about it (Berger and Luckmann; 1967: 33-37).
For Berger and Luckmann reality is “a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition” (Berger and Luckmann; 1967:13). They talked about sociology of knowledge, according to them knowledge is produced and maintained in everyday life. As per them, “the world of everyday life is not only taken for granted as reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives, it is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these” (Berger and Luckmann; 1967:33).

Andrew J. Weigert defined theory of everyday life as:

- “Everyday life is a taken-for-granted reality which provides the unquestioned background of meaning for each person’s life;
- Everyday life is a plausible social context and believable personal world within which a person derives a sense of self as living a real biography;
- Everyday life is both the fundamental empirical starting point and the final subject matter for understanding human life and society as natural realities;
- Therefore, everyday life cannot be known merely passively or objectively, but must also be criticized and interpreted actively and subjectively in order to be understood adequately.” (Ghosh; n.p:11).

According to Jenkins, “A Social Constructionist approach to ethnicity and cultural differentiation involves, of necessity, an appreciation that ethnic identity is situationally variable and negotiable.” (Jenkins; 1997:50).

Before I start with the analysis, I want the reader to keep in mind a few things about the Parsi community. The Parsi community is more educated as compared to other sister communities of Mumbai. Many of them attend talks and lectures on religion by various scholars and read religious texts before forming any opinion. Therefore, the movement between believers, partial believers, and non-believers, was very fluid in different life stages of an individual.
Myths, beliefs, and rituals of the community and the theory of everyday life

In this section I have analyzed the beliefs, rituals, and practices in the day-to-day life of individuals. It was divided into two sub-sections – Everyday practices and Rites of passage. The data was analyzed from the perspective of believers, partial believers, and non-believers. It elaborates what defines the believers, partial believers, and non-believers. This section projects beliefs and practices which show what believers and partial believers followed and what they did not, concentrating more on personal aspects of religion. Therefore, I have not talked much about non-believers unless really necessary because the idea of personal religion was not prevalent amongst them.

Before starting with analysis, I would like the reader to keep in mind that in the process of settling down in India, Parsis had adopted cultural elements from local population as they landed in Gujarat. In the process of acculturation, many ritualistic beliefs and practices were adopted. These were considered as Zoroastrian by partial believers because everyone practiced them.

**Everyday Practices**

Parsis were supposed to follow a strict religious regime. For example, immediately after waking up in the morning, Parsis were supposed to touch the ground and pray to Spenta Armaiti (Amesha Spenta of Earth) and did padyab kusti before they started their daily chores. Similarly, at the change of each geh, Parsis were supposed to pray and did padyab kusti. Other than believers, Parsis had given up on these religious practices. Practicing priests had to follow these norms because they were part of their tharikhats. Practicing priests tried to follow as much as they could but sometimes depending on the situation they could not strictly follow these norms. Even believers could not follow the ritual because of space constraints, for example, they could not do kusti in office. However, whatever they practiced, they practiced in a prescribed manner. Some partial believers did kusti as they woke up in the morning, but not at the change of each geh.
Believers did padyab kusti as prescribed by scriptures. According to them, they maintained prescribed levels of purity in rituals and in recitation of prayers. They always did padyab kusti at dedicated places in their house, which was in front of the divo. They believed that dedicated place was charged with vibrations because they and their family members prayed at the same place for years. These vibrations made padyab kusti more effective. They believed that kusti was done for spiritual purification. If it was done in wrong manner, then it had no effect and an individual remained spiritually impure. As prescribed, they did kusti five times a day. Some believers, who worked in the co-operate sector, could not do padyab kusti five times a day because at office there was no place to do kusti. Their situation made them feel bad but they believed that God knows that the present times were not good to practice the religion and God would take care of them. Along with the prayers, rituals were equally important for believers because according to them, rituals were a path to reach God. They criticized partial believers for not following all the rituals and defiling religion.

Partial believers had variations in practicing the ritual of padyab kusti. Some tried to follow the ritual daily because they felt that if they won’t then something might go wrong with them. Most of them performed the ritual once a day. Sometimes they did not do kusti in front of divo because they had less time in the morning. Some even skipped the ritual if they didn’t have time. Some did padyab kusti in the evening because they got time after finishing their daily chores. As compared to believers, partial believers did not always maintain prescribed high levels of purity while performing padyab kusti. Some even did paydab kusti without taking a bath i.e. they washed exposed parts of their body and did the ritual. Some of them like non-believers did not do paydab kusti daily. They only did padyab kusti when they had to go for some religious gathering, e.g. visit the dhungarwari, Fire Temple, etc. But whenever non-believers did paydab kusti, they did it the way partial believers did it.

Some partial believers did not wear sudreh-kusti while going to the Fire Temple. Many young Parsis had stopped wearing kusti because they were not forced by their elders. This liberal attitude of the parents was taken for granted by children, who did not make any effort to continue wearing sudreh-kusti. Young girls did not wear kusti when they had to wear short dresses or sari. They felt ashamed to wear sudreh-kusti because it was not
considered fashionable and they feared that they might be mocked upon by their non-parsi friends. Younger generation did not know much about religious practices. Even when some elderly person told them about these practices, they didn’t strictly follow the instructions. This is how change is taking place in the community.

When people were in the process of transformation from partial believers to non-believers, first thing they gave up was symbolic aspect of religion. For example, non-believers stopped wearing *sudreh-kusti* when they were in transition phase. Giving up symbolic aspect of religion was the first level of rebel. The second level was giving up on ritualistic practices and the final stage was publicly accepting one’s status as a non-believer. As mentioned earlier, personal religion became social religion for the non-believers. Most of them wore *sudreh-kusti* for religious gatherings, especially at the time of death. They believed that being non-believer was individual choice but they could not annoy their loved ones, who were believers or partial believers.

“I have a set of *sudreh-kusti* at home which I wear at the time of funeral or visiting the fire temple. It was more of a social obligation. It doesn’t even matter to me till the time its keeping my wife happy” – Rusti, 65 yrs, Male.

Practices mandatory in day-to-day life were not given much importance by partial believers. Prayers were not always performed as prescribed. Ideally, they were supposed to pray at a dedicated place at home, in front of the *divo*, but they skipped these prayers when they got late for work. Partial believers had stopped practicing most of the rituals. They picked up bits and pieces of practices which suited them. Many partial believers prayed at their convenience, they accommodated prayers whenever they got time, i.e., during evening walks, while traveling, etc. They owed it to their laziness and lack of time, which they called ‘practical reasons’. Some partial believers had forgotten the prayers because they had not recited them since long. Some of them prayed whenever they felt it was necessary for their spiritual development. They also prayed whenever they faced trouble in life.

Partial believers liked the flexibility provided by their religion, while praying. People could pray any prayer they wished and at their preferred time. That was one of the reasons, partial believers cited for praying as per their convenience. This was their way to
connect to God. Ritualistic aspects of prayers were not given much importance. Praying as per convenience becomes more important as compared to following prescribed rituals. They believed that by concentrating on rituals, ritual became more important than prayers. This outlook of partial believers was highly criticized by believers. Believers thought that if an individual could mould religion as per their convenience then what was the need of rituals. Rituals were made because they had significance. Not following the rituals was as good as not praying.

Most of the times partial believers got involved in other aspects of life and religion became of secondary importance. Personal religion became important for partial believers when they were in crisis/problematic situation i.e. they prayed more at times of crisis/need. At times of problem they visited specific Fire Temple on specific roz, if once their wishes had come true. For example, some people went to Daslag agyari on meher roz. On Mondays, some visited the Banaji Atashbehram. Many students prayed at the time of their examinations. Their belief shattered if they did not get desirable results despite praying more. Some prayed because they wanted God to make things simpler for them and if things did not happen as desired, their belief was shattered. The shattered belief was regained when they faced some other crisis, they fell back on religion. This time if they got desirable results their belief may be regained. To overcome situations of crisis, there were many beliefs related to prayers, for instance Hosh Ban prayer prayed at the time of dawn gave intelligence; Ashem Vohu recited 1114 times during the waxing of the moon, i.e., between the first day and the 14th day of the lunar month, had power to

Partial believers attended religious classes to understand the meaning of the sacred texts from scholars. Some of them had stopped finding meanings because every scholar had his own interpretations of the sacred text. According to them, meditating and thinking about God was the real prayer and the source of enlightenment. This way of praying, made prayers a spiritual necessity which was continued throughout the day. They gave up the prescribed rituals and followed other practices by which they felt closer to God.

According to believers, prayers were most effective when the devotee fully concentrated on each and every word recited while praying. Believers tried their best to concentrate
while praying. Partial believers were seldom able to concentrate. According to them it became very difficult to concentrate when there were distractions around and there were no quiet places. It was more important to recite prayers while doing some work than concentrating on the words. The hectic lifestyle of Mumbai left them with less time for prayers. It became very difficult for people to follow all the norms. Therefore, they preferred to pray with some alterations than not praying at all. Some of them were scared of repercussions of not praying. They thought that God might punish them if they did not pray regularly. According to believers, Parsis were not supposed to speak while praying. Unlike partial believers, believers observed this practice very strictly. They did not take any phone call or meet anyone while praying. Most practicing priests followed this practice as meticulously as they could because it was part of their work.

Ideally, Parsis were supposed to cover their heads 24 hours a day. Believers always kept their heads covered. Some partial believers also covered their heads but most partial believers did not. They covered their heads only while praying and at times this practice was also not followed, especially when they prayed during evening walks, traveling, etc. Sometimes, partial believers even forgot to cover their heads while praying at home.

Black was an inauspicious color but the head covers used by people, even by most believers, was generally black in color. None questioned the use of black head gear when, in almost everything, black was considered inauspicious. People used black caps because they were most easily available. Believers felt that it was better to use black caps than not wearing caps at all. Some of them wanted to continue wearing black caps than wearing colored caps because they did not want to be mocked upon by non-parsis.

Most Parsis did not understand the prayers, as they were written in the Avestan language. Most partial believers prayed because they were told by the priests that prayers produced vibrations. These vibrations were considered good for their well being. These vibrations were also good for purification of the environment. People believed the priests because priests had more knowledge as they had read the Holy Scriptures. Some believers had learned the language and understood the meaning of prayers. Believers prayed because they could feel vibrations while praying.
Parsis were mostly made fun of by other communities. In Bollywood movies, they were always shown as a comic character. Young Parsis felt ashamed of their identity at times. When interacting with other communities, they maintained a low profile so that people did not scoff at them or criticize them. For example, during the ten days of gathas, Parsis were not supposed to get a hair cut done, or trim their nails or even shave. Partial believers did not follow the practice to avoid mockery by other communities. The common reason they site was acceptance in office.

"I do shave during Gatha days, I can't help it out, I can't keep beard. In office if I have to go for client meeting, my boss will not accept it. Moreover, people make fun at times, its good not to follow this." - Jal, 27 yrs, Male.

The norms related to purity and pollution were supposed to be maintained in the Fire Temple. Believers always maintained these norms. They went to the Fire Temple immediately after taking a ‘head’ bath. On their way to Fire Temple, they were not supposed to come in contact with any person, especially non-parsis because the individual could be impure. Many believers devotedly followed this practice. They generally visited Fire Temple at a walk-able distance from their house. If they had to go to a far-off Fire Temple, they avoided taking public transport. They would not go to Fire Temple for months if they could not maintain this level of purity. They believed that going to the Fire Temple impure would defile the fire and they should not do that to God. It was acceptable not to visit the Fire Temple than defying the fire. God would overlook this because he knew their circumstances. Non-believers did not go to the Fire Temple. Some of them went on festivals, which they considered a social obligation. The level of purity maintained by non-believers and partial believers was similar. Partial believers went to the Fire Temple as per their convenience. Though partial believers visited the Fire Temple sometimes, they did not pray for long hours. They went anytime during the day, which could also be without taking a bath. Busy hours at the office did not allow them to visit the Fire Temple in the morning. They often used public transport to go to their favorite Fire Temple. According to them, going to the Fire Temple was more important than following norms.
Inside the Fire Temple, believers followed all the prescribed rituals of religion. Believers criticized partial believers for not following code of conduct in the Fire Temple. Some of them also kept a vigil on partial believers. They shouted at people who did not follow the code of conduct inside the Fire Temple. For example, believers criticized partial believers who came in dirty clothes, especially during the rainy season. This attitude of the believers did stop some people from visiting the same Fire Temple and some people started following the norm in that specific Fire Temple. Some believers kept a vigil on people who entered the Fire Temple.

"We don't allow converted people to enter our Fire Temple. It was not easy to detect the converts, unless you know them or you see someone odd. There was Atesh Behram at marine lines. I was praying there. It was on my birthday. I saw young girl in t-shirt and jeans. She was wearing a short top, I could see she was not wearing sudreh. She went to the kebla and put sukhad and went back. Then second girl came, I was quite disturbed and thought something was going wrong. Being a male I was hesitant to ask that girl. So I asked an old female devotee in the Fire Temple, to ask that girl for her identity. Then I came to know that girl was from Iran and was Zoroastrian. When the old lady asked for her sudreh, she said sudreh was not worn in Iran. I told her baldly that in Iran you don't wear sudreh but here the rule was, when you enter the Fire Temple you have to perform kusti. If you don't have sudreh you can not come in. Then she told me that they were a group of Irani tourists and there was a person standing at the door who was giving them caps, so that they can enter the Fire Temple. As he has only one cap, therefore one person was entering at a time. I pushed her out and fortunately no one came inside to fight with me because all of them must be doing the same thing and they might have gone away. It was the fault of our trustees, the sign board says 'Only for Zoroastrians'. If they want to prevent such incidences then I think they should change the sign board to 'Only for Parsi/Irani Zoroastrians'.

"Similarly, in another Atesh Behram there was a person who did not look like a Parsi, as the priests knew me, they asked me to find out. That person spoke in broken English, so I had this doubt that he was not a Parsi. He told me that he was a Zoroastrian. I asked him to leave immediately. Fortunately
he was in outside hall, therefore his presence did not harm the fire to a large extent. He said he was not Parsi but Zoroastrian. I think what he meant was that he was converted. From his talk I made out he was not a Parsi, so I asked him to leave.

“Sometimes, people also come in by mistake. Once I saw a group of bhaiyaji’s walking inside the Fire Temple premises to ask for address. Though we have a watchman but he couldn’t stop them, he was not attentive. Moreover, watchman will not ask every person for his identity. This responsibility was on people like us. Sometimes priests are also scared to ask. Suppose high personality come inside, we ask question and they complain to the trusties and trusties ask questions from us. They are not very forthcoming on security issues. Therefore people like me have to take up more responsibility.” – Firoze, 47 yrs, Male.

Partial believers did not follow all the norms laid by the priests because most of the times they were unaware of the norms. At times, priests tried to explain the importance of rituals. Partial believers did not believe the priests because they felt that every priest had his own interpretation and they were not sure whom to believe and whom not to. They ended up practicing what they thought was good, instead of following the priest. Partial believers did things they were not supposed to do inside the Fire Temple, for example, greeting one another, getting into small conversations, carrying mobile phones, kissing pictures and prayer books, leaving prayer books on chairs, etc. Some of them did not perform padyab kusti if they had done it at home immediately before entering the Fire Temple. They thought it was important to do kusti, whether it was done at home or at the Fire Temple was immaterial. Some young people entered the Fire Temple without the sudreh-kusti. They thought that more than wearing the sudreh-kusti, it was important to go to the Fire Temple. Partial believers thought that if they started following all the norms then they would not be able to go to the Fire Temple because they did not get time to do their daily chores.

Parsis made sure that their clothes were clean before going to the Fire Temple. Believers did not put them on the bed because it was impure as people had sexual relations on the bed. This was strictly followed by believers but not by partial believers.
Female believers also had a separate set of *sudreh-kusti* which they wore at the time of their menstrual cycle because females were considered impure during these days of the month. After the menstrual cycle was over, they washed this set and kept it aside for the next time. Partial believers did not have a separate set kept aside for menstrual days. Women were also not supposed to work in the kitchen. Believers followed this norm, whereas partial believers did not because in nuclear families, it was difficult to maintain.

With *rakhyat* on their forehead, one was not supposed to leave the premises of the *Fire Temple*. Often people came out of the *Fire Temple* with *rakhyat* on their foreheads.

When Parsis visited *Fire Temple*, they were supposed to cover their body as much as possible. Young Parsis, especially girls, were criticized by believers, some partial believers and non-believers, for wearing short skirts in *Fire Temples*. On the contrary, the younger generation criticized the believers, accusing them for looking at girls inside the *Fire Temple*, instead of praying.

"These days young people do not dress up properly, they wear all kind of short clothes. Going to agyari was more like a fashion parade for these people."

Meherdad, 57 yrs, Male.

*Udwada* visit was considered very sacred; one had to maintain a high level of purity. Some partial believers were criticized by believers for going to the *Udwara* from the railway station, without taking a bath. For many partial believers, it was important to go to the *Udwara*. They could not financially afford to stay there, so they made a one-day trip to the *Udwara* by train.

Traditionally, Zoroastrian houses were supposed to have fire burning in the house twenty four hours a day because fire was supposed to bring positive energy and good spirits. It was not possible to have a fire burning in the house, so the substitute for the fire was the *divo*. Believers kept the *divo* burning twenty four hours a day, while partial believers felt they could not keep the *divo* burning all the time. Some did not have the time and the resources to keep it burning all the time. When people lit the *divo* in the house, it should not be filled with water. Due to financial constrains, many partial believers used water along with oil to keep the *divo* lit longer. This practice was highly criticized by believers.
because they believed that if water was added to the *divo*, it made a crackling noise, which symbolized the crying of the fire.

East was the most auspicious direction while praying. This rule was followed by all the people when they were in the *Fire Temple* because it was designed in such a manner. At home, people avoided facing North but due to space constrains they did not mind keeping the *divo* in the other three directions.

Rules of purity and pollution were not generally followed by everyone. At the time of *jashan*, there should be no non-parsi in the house. Believers followed the rule very strictly but partial believers invited their non-parsi friends for *jashan*. Believers strongly criticized the practice because, according to them, the presence of a non-parsi nullified the effect of *Jashan*. Partial believers invited non-parsi because they were friends and they should also be benefited from *Jashan*.

After *nahan*, every cloth piece worn should be new because people were pure. Partial believers generally used old washed towels and never changed their gold jewellery because gold was considered a pure metal. Some believers changed jewellery but wore the old one after washing it with lime or taro.

For auspicious reasons whenever a person stepped in and out of some ritual he had to use the right foot. Most people did not know about this belief so they did not follow it.

Any dead material coming out of the body was *naso*. It had to be disposed off properly with prayers and rituals so that the *naso* did not spread and harm people. Believers followed this practice with their nails but they could not follow it for their hair because the hair were disposed off by the barber. Partial believers did not always follow this practice. People had to throw hair and nails in the dustbin, bathroom and at times away from the house. They were not supposed to cut nails at night but some did not always follow this.

For believers all days in the calendar were equally auspicious. Partial believers had beliefs related to calendar like, *Behram roj* on Friday was considered a very auspicious day and was celebrated. Most people tried going to the *Fire Temple* on that day because they believed that their wishes would come true since they were praying to God on such
an auspicious day. Believers did not go to the Fire Temples on these days because the temples were crowded and they could not pray at the temple. The 19th day in the Zoroastrian Calendar was for Fravashi. People did not perform any auspicious function on that day because they associated Fravashi with departed souls. This was not followed by the believers at the personal level but they had to follow this practice because their family members insisted.

Purity was highly maintained among the believers. They avoided contact with non-parsis. Though they tried to maintain high levels of purity but it was not always possible. They did come in contact with the non-parsis. For example, household helpers were non-parsis. Though it was not always a direct contact, logically this contact could also defile their purity and hence the fire. This fact was overlooked for reasons of convenience by the believers.

The extent of practiced religion changed depending on different life stages of an individual.

"When I was young, I was very careless. I was involved into various activities. I never listened to my parents when they told me the importance of rituals, e.g. wearing sudreh-kusti. My parents were very liberal; they taught me things but never forced me to follow them. When I went to the hostel, I shared my room with two other people. I was the only bawa there. Initially I tried to do kusti everyday but I stopped it soon. People used to make fun of me which I never liked. Moreover, there was no one to keep a check on me. It was convenient to give up wearing sudreh-kusti. Later on I started with my job. During those days I started attending some religious classes and analyzing things. Then I realized what a fool I was. After that I follow as much as I can. Now, whenever I have time on weekends I go to the Fire Temple and pray for long hours. I do tell my children to do the same, but they don’t listen much." - Khushroo, 57 yrs, Male.

Other than the believers no one followed the rituals strictly. With all the changes in the community, believers thought that attitude of the partial believers and non-believers had ruined the community. Many scholars talked about the positive impact of colonialism and westernization on the Parsi community, especially in the domains of education, economics, etc. Present community was not as prosperous as it used to be in the past.
Believers attributed this change to the acts of partial believers and non-believers. Believers thought that because people were not following all the norms of religion, it was affecting the community as a whole. Believers thought that colonialism or westernization had ruined the community.

"Today, I'm sorry to say that Parsi community was most educated but most uneducated as far as religion was concerned. Western ways have ruined our community." - Parvez, 47 yrs, Male.

Rites of passage

There was not much difference in the rituals conducted by believers, partial believers, and non-believers. Some rites of passage were considered different from religion as they were adopted from Hinduism. Rites of navjote, marriage and death, in which priests were involved were considered important by believers because they were not adopted from Hinduism. The changes discussed in this section had occurred over generations.

Pregnancy and delivery - As these rituals were not considered Zoroastrian; flexibility in these rituals was acceptable. Due to practical reasons, some customs were moulded according to convenience of the pregnant woman. The ceremony did not necessarily take place at the parents' or in-laws' house. They did not go from one house to another. After Agharni, the pregnant lady was supposed to stay at the mothers' house. These days this practice was generally not followed because from the start of the pregnancy the woman was treated in a hospital near her in-laws' house. She thus preferred to stay there. Moreover, most of the times women preferred to stay with their husbands during the last days of pregnancy.

Though there were many activities barred for pregnant woman, people did not follow all the rules. Ideally, at the death of close relatives, a pregnant woman was not supposed to go to the Dhungarwari. These days, there were cases where the woman attended all the ceremonies and the priests did not resist the presence of a pregnant lady in such ceremonies. A woman was not supposed to cross any water body, but when they went to the udwara they had to cross the river which they did not mind. These days the priests were not able to provide any convincing answers to people. Even if someone provided
answers, people did not believe them or follow them. People followed rituals that suited their routine. They did take risks when it came to small things, but when it came to bigger things like eclipses, they took full precautions.

When the child was born, it was supposed to be covered with old clothes. People generally did not follow the custom now. As said earlier, Parsis were educated and always looked for reasons before they followed some aspect of religion. People did not follow rules and customs which seemed illogical. For forty days after pregnancy the mother and child had to maintain high standards of purity and pollution. Except the believers most people did not follow it stringently. They did go out for movies, dinners, etc. They did not participate in any religious ceremony or visit the Fire Temple. After forty days, the mother and the child underwent nahan, and then they could go to the Fire Temple. Women did not participate in religious ceremonies because they were scared of criticism from society.

If someone kept falling in later years, people teased him saying that he did not break the ladoos properly during pagladu. Some people were suspicious to the extent that they got ladoos in their old age and broke them.

Navjote and marriage - Navjote was supposed to take place in an isolated place so that no non-parsi could see it. Many believers got navjote of their children done in the Fire Temple and then gave a feast where non-parsis were also invited. The same was practiced by partial believers. They got their children’s navjote done in the evening in the presence of non-parsis and a feast was given later on. Non-believers had also got the navjote of their children done in a similar manner to the partial believers. For them, it was more of a social pressure because partial believers in the family wanted to get the ritual done. Moreover, navjote also made an individual a Parsi. The individual was accepted by the community, who could use this identity for benefits provided by the community. This also gave an individual a choice to ‘stay in’ or ‘move out’ of the community whenever desired.

Black was considered the color of evil and Parsis were not supposed to wear black on auspicious occasions. Believers followed the rule strongly. Partial believers could wear
black dresses on someone else’s navjote or marriage. They did not wear black dresses for marriage or navjote of close family members because they had to participate in the ritual. They could not wear black because they would be criticized by the priest and fellow members. Moreover, it was believed that black would bring bad luck to the person whose navjote or marriage was done. Partial believers feared that if something wrong happened with the person whose navjote/marriage was conducted, everyone would criticize them. Partial believers were very careful when they participated in rituals pertaining to social religion. They made sure that they followed all the norms of the society because they wanted to avoid any kind of criticism by the community members. People never took risk in matters of soul, e.g. black was still acceptable on weddings but not during last rites.

Widows were not allowed to participate in any auspicious rituals. Believers followed the custom but some partial believers started involving widows in the rituals. Non-parsi spouses of Parsi males faced similar treatment as did widows, from believers, partial believers and non-believers. They could not take part in the rituals because they were impure. In present situation things had changed, when the person was a close relative, then they did participate in the rituals.

The time of auspicious events like marriage/navjote depended on availability of family members and baugs. These were preferably done on auspicious days according to the Zoroastrian calendar. No ceremony took place on Wednesday because it was considered inauspicious. According to Zoroastrian calendar Wednesday had no significance as it was part of English Calendar. Believers at the personal level did not believe in such things but they followed the custom because of social pressure. Marriages took place during the night and navjotes during the day. Auspicious time was not considered when the date was fixed but when people had to leave home for good work, they did consider the auspicious time which was given at the back of the calendar. This auspicious time was based on the Gujarati belief, not the Zoroastrian religion.

Death - During the four-day death ceremonies, the family was supposed to observe many restrictions. The kind of restrictions they observed varied from family to family. Priestly families where elders were mostly believers observed most of the rituals and tried to
ensure that their children also followed the same. The rules were less stringent for children. In Bedin families, older people observed some restrictions but younger people did not. Parents did not force their children to stop going out for movies/plays, and listen to music but they did not do this in public or make it loud.

Religious routine was transferred from parents to children. When children did not see their parents praying they also followed. In the course of time the practice was lost. Some young people did not know if the practice existed. To follow a strict religious routine, a person had to get involved in lot of rituals. Owing to busy schedules and hectic lifestyle in Mumbai, religion was not practiced to the extent it was preached. In the day-to-day life of Mumbai, it became practically impossible to forcefully get into ritualistic practices which were time-consuming and monotonous. Unless the person found benefit in rituals, they would not choose it over their source of entertainment. Though there were Parsis who followed the religious routines but these rituals were simpler and comfortable to follow as compared to others. Rituals which were not followed were lost with time.

When someone died, ideally, auspicious ceremonies like navjote and marriage should not be arranged in the family. Believers followed the rule whereas partial believers did not follow it strictly. Navjote/marriage dates were often fixed at the convenience of family members. There were close relatives who came from abroad. These relatives could not visit often so people continued with these ceremonies. Dates were only changed if some very close relative expired. If the death happened one month earlier, then dates were often not changed.

When someone came back from death ceremony, one was supposed to take a bath before touching anything because they had to nullify the effect of naso. Partial believers did not follow the rule very strictly. Many times people had to go directly to the office after the funeral ceremony. They did not take a bath but did kusti for purification.

When women were on their menstrual cycle they were not allowed to go to the Dhungarwari. Partial believers did not always follow this rule. If some close relative had died sometimes they went and sat outside the bangli. Some women used this excuse to avoid going to Dhungarwari.
While walking with the corpse, people were supposed to hold hands with the handkerchief in the middle. Many Parsis did not know the meaning of this practice; therefore they did not follow the rule.

To conclude, from the above examples it was clear that everyday religion was taken for granted. Most people knew of practiced religion by their parents. Partial believers were the ones who brought changes in practiced religion as they followed religion as per their convenience and also changed their religious schedule. Beliefs and rituals adopted from other religions were accepted as part of Zoroastrianism because a majority of the people, i.e., the partial believers, followed them. These beliefs and rituals were taken for granted by partial believers and were also accepted sooner or later by believers and non-believers as part of their religion. Believers drew boundaries at cost of non-believers and partial believers. Partial believers might not consider themselves as partial believers but according to convenience they shift between believers and non-believers.

When it came to personal religion, norms were not always followed by partial believers, but when it came to social religion, norms were always followed because people were scared of criticism. They wanted acceptance in the community, therefore, they would follow all the norms pertaining to religion. These partial believers were accepted by the community as Parsis. Non-believers who did not go against the norms of the society were also accepted by the community. The criteria of acceptance and rejection depended on the choices an individual made regarding social religion rather than personal religion. When people followed norms which did not affect the functioning of the community as a whole, they were accepted by the society, irrespective of the personal choices they made. This might be termed here as ‘balance of acceptability.’

Impact of religion on demography, especially with regard to birth, death and marriage practices

In this section I will discuss the most sensitive and controversial issues regarding birth, marriage, and death prevalent in the community. These issues had divided the community
into two groups – Orthodox and Reformists. Most Parsis fall in either of the two groups. Considering the earlier criteria of believers, partial believers and non-believers; I would say that all believers were orthodox Parsis and all non-believers were reformists. Partial believers, which outnumber the other two extremes, had people who belonged to both orthodox and reformist groups. In this section, I shall distinguish between the two groups of orthodox and reformists as – ‘Orthodox partial believers, and ‘Reformist partial believers’.

The section also covers the extent to which excommunication takes place – who was accepted as a Parsi and who was not, the boundaries made by believers and orthodox partial believers by everyday practices in everyday life. It also covers the perspective of reformists and reformist partial believers and whom they accept as Parsis. This acceptance by the groups affects the most sensitive issue within and outside the community, i.e., demography. I have divided the section into – birth, marriage and death; and the way they affect the demography of the community.

Birth

According to Zoroastrianism, a child could only be a Zoroastrian if both the parents were Zoroastrians. At the start of twentieth century when the number of inter-religious marriages increased Parsi panchayat administered to follow the patrilineal system in the community, according to which children of Parsi fathers and non-parsi mothers could be brought into the fold, whereas, children of non-parsi fathers and Parsi mothers could not be. Due to this regulation Parsis started blaming females for marrying outside the community which resulted in dwindling numbers. The panchayat administered this rule because in the then social structure, the child always practiced religion of the father. The problem began when Parsi females having children with non-parsi males wanted to bring their children into the fold, especially if the non-parsi spouse had no issues with it and wanted to adopt the religion.

The different perspectives of orthodox and reformist Parsis on accepting children from inter-religious marriages are discussed below:
Orthodox - This group includes people who were believers and orthodox partial believers. They were very proud of the community and felt that their genes were superior and should be replicated, not diluted. More and more children should be born only of Parsi parents.

Believers felt that children from inter-religious marriages should not be accepted, irrespective of gender. According to them, when an individual decided to marry outside the community they decided to give up their faith. They should follow the religion of the spouse and not try to bring their children within the fold. The numbers were not important for them because when they came to India, their numbers were low. They measured religion not with respect to numbers but with respect to the extent it was followed by its followers. They did not mind dying out as a community because they considered it as a plan wrought by God. They accepted children of Parsi fathers and non-parsi mothers because it was a panchayat rule. Believers and orthodox partial believers also felt that children of Parsi fathers and non-parsi mothers should be accepted because the father’s genes had more influence on the child as compared to the mother’s. Therefore, children from such marriages were acceptable but children of Parsi mothers and non-parsi fathers were shunned by them as being non-parsi. When a Parsi girl married outside the religion, believers said that these girls should follow religion of their spouse and give up their own religion, but they did not accept non-parsi girls married to Parsi men practice Zoroastrianism. They would criticize these women for defiling their religion by trying to become a part of Zoroastrianism because they were essentially non-parsis.

From a common person’s perspective navjote was the ceremony which brought children within the Zoroastrian fold. Believers did not attend the navjotes of children from inter-religious marriages. They felt that when one visited such functions, they blessed the child. Religion did not accept children from inter-religious marriages. Therefore, it was not a navjote in the eyes of God. Orthodox partial believers attended the navjote ceremony of children of Parsi fathers and non-parsi mothers as a part of the social gathering but they did not attend the navjote ceremony of children of Parsi mothers and non-parsi fathers. Attending these navjotes in the name of social gatherings by Orthodox partial believers was the first step towards acceptance by Partial orthodox believers.
Zoroastrian religion did not differentiate individuals on the basis of gender. In the case of acceptance, panchayat rule held more importance as compared to religion. This practice was accepted by all the members as part of Zoroastnism and was taken for granted in the everyday life by a majority of them.

Reformists - Reformists on the other hand criticized the Parsi panchayat rule. According to them if children of males were acceptable then even females should be accepted. They wanted the numbers to go up and according to them the only way it was possible was to accept children from inter-religious marriages, irrespective of gender.

Two priests conducted the navjote of children born of Parsi mothers and non-parsi fathers. These priests were supported by a reformist organization ARZ. Non-believers and some reformist partial believers in the community were accepting the navjotes of Parsi mothers and non-parsi fathers. This acceptance was not related to religion, rather, it had more to do with acceptance in the community and making them part of the community. Other reformist partial believers did not accept such navjotes because they were not accepted by a majority of the people. There were women who wanted their children to follow the religion but could not do so because when the children were young and their navjote could be done, there was no priest available. The situation was different now, with the availability of priests Parsis could easily get these navjotes done. According to ARZ, believers and orthodox partial believers had to accept this change. They had to accept children to increase their numbers because religion could only survive if there were followers to practice it.

Effect on Demography - Navjote of a Parsi child affected the demography directly. The acceptance criterion differed among believers, partial believers, and non-believers. But if the children were accepted as Parsi by a set of people, he would be treated as one and became a part of the community, irrespective of the fact what other group felt about this acceptance.

When the census was done, it followed the patrilineal system while counting members of the community. In the Parsi community, children of males married to non-parsi were considered as Parsi, whereas, the same was not true for females. The Parsi female married to a non-parsi was considered a Parsi but her children were considered to be non-
parsi. Census only takes information which was given to them regarding religion. Most people did not know this rule. They assumed that religion of the child would be same as that of the father and that was how they informed the census officials. The navjotes of children from Parsi women and non-parsi men made these children Parsi, which often went unrecorded.

Moreover, with more people from inter-religious marriages opting for navjotes of their children, the number of Parsis had not gone down at an exponential rate. If the community followed what orthodox Parsis believed then the community would have been left with only a handful of Parsis. The present demographic situation was because they had accepted children of non-parsi mothers and Parsi fathers. With the increase in acceptance of children born of Parsi mothers and non-parsi fathers, the rate at which the numbers would be lowered, will be slower.

Marriage

As mentioned earlier, it was the marriage issue which was a major distinguisher between orthodox and reformist Parsis. Both the groups had distinct views about inter-religious marriages.

Inter-religious marriages were happening at an increasing rate. The various reasons were cited in the previous chapter. One of them was that males and females did not find suitable match for themselves within the community. Women were more open to the idea of inter-religious marriages as compared to men. Due to various reasons women did not wish to marry Parsi boys. Some of them had strong apprehensions about marrying within the community. They did not like the attitude of Parsis and felt at many occasions that they could not relate to the community. Moreover, they had comparatively better options of finding spouses outside the community. Men think that women had lots of aspirations which they might not be able to fulfill. They would like to marry a girl who could respect their parents.

Parsis always accused women for marrying outside the community. The reason cited was that women were more educated than the males and were earning more and were not able
to find a right match. As mentioned earlier the records of Parsiana showed that an almost equal number of marriages were happening in both the genders.

Marriage was a personal decision for non-believers. When it came to marriage, they first considered individual choices and then thought about community or religion. On the contrary, believers opted for intra-religious marriages. For them, personal religion and social religion were equally important. Marriage for them was a religious decision and one should marry within the community. As far as partial believers were concerned, for most of them personal religion held more importance as compared to social religion. Most of them preferred their children to marry within the community but accepted inter-religious marriages. This was what transforms them from orthodox partial believers to reformist partial believers. The perspective of both the groups is discussed below:

Orthodox - Believers were totally against inter-religious marriages. They wanted young Parsis to marry within the community because they wished to preserve the purity of blood which was considered equivalent to purity at the spiritual level. Orthodox partial believers wished to preserve rites which would preserve ethnicity and vice-versa. According to them, religion would only survive if they could preserve their ethnicity because ethnicity and religion were not distinct. Inter-religious marriages were not acceptable because children followed the religion of the spouse who belonged to other religions. Some believed that ethnicity was more important than religion for the survival of the community. According to them, inter-religious marriages would wipe out the community, hence were not acceptable for the survival of the community and the religion.

Orthodox Parsis, which included believers and strong orthodox partial believers, maintained a distance from the Parsis who had married outside the community. These intermarried couples were treated like non-parsi. Some of them accepted men who had opted for inter-religious marriages but women were never accepted. Believers criticized women for marrying outside the community and becoming non-parsi by giving up their religion. They did not wish to accept these women within the community even if their spouses had no issues with it. Culturally, the patrilineal aspect of Indian society had so much become a part of their everyday life that they did not accept women who had
married outside the community. In such a situation, religion held secondary importance as compared to social norms.

Orthodox people did not attend inter-religious marriages even if it was of their close relative. They believed that by going for such weddings one encouraged them and participated in a sin. Ideally people should go for weddings because they wanted to bless the couple. If one blessed a wrong-doing then he participated in the sin. These people did not interact with people who had opted for inter-religious marriages. They were also ready to disinherit their children if they took such a decision.

Believers never invited inter-married Parsis for any religious event, like jashan, navjote, etc. They never visited the homes of inter-married couples. There had been cases where believers refused to eat food served by Parsi girls married to non-parsi men. These restrictions were stronger for women as compared to men, since they still remain a Parsi after inter-religious marriages, whereas women were considered to be a non-parsi.

"When my sister got married to a non-parsi our family was invited by family friends for lunch. One man in the family was too orthodox; he came back from the fire temple and sat to eat food. When my sister started to serve him food, he refused and asked his wife to serve him food. I think this was total hypocrisy, they will eat the vegetables served by a servant who was a non-parsi but not food served from our hands because we are impure as we have married out of religion." – Naz, 27 yrs, Female.

Orthodox partial believers maintained a partial distance from a non-parsi spouse. They accepted inter-religious marriages of their children but did not allow non-parsi spouses to get involved into religious activities. Though the wife of the son became part of the family and was treated like one, but when it came to the religious aspect she remained a non-parsi and was treated like one. A non-parsi spouse was not allowed to touch the prayer area or the prayer books. When a jashan was done, a non-parsi spouse was supposed to leave the household for that duration. For this reason, some non-parsi spouses felt humiliated. They considered themselves as second citizens and sometimes equivalent to untouchables. When they compared their households with reformist
households, they consulted priests to guide them regarding what was acceptable and not acceptable according to the religion.

Believers stopped talking to people who had married outside the community, even if it was their child. These people were completely shunned by the believers. Orthodox partial believers shunned people, depending on the kind of relationship they had with them. They would completely shun other people who had married outside the community but would partially accept their children. Some orthodox partial believers would themselves not prefer to marry outside the community because they thought it was a sin but would not mind other Parsis marrying a non-parsi.

Parsis who had opted for inter-religious marriages should not enter the Fire Temple. Believers felt very bad about the fact that legally they could not be stopped from entering the temple. All temples were managed by the trust which has a rule that Fire Temple were for the benefit of Parsi/Irani Zoroastrians. There was no Indian law which stated that if a Farsi married outside he lost his religion. Some priests knew Parsis who had married outside the religion but still visited the temple. These priests gave these Parsis disgusted looks, though some of them often insulted these Parsis and had also thrown them out of the Fire Temple.

The aspect which was most feared from inter-religious marriages was, conversion. When a Parsi woman married into religions like, Christianity, Islam, Sanatam Dharam, etc., they were expected to convert into the religion of their spouse. Many Parsi women had converted after marriage in earlier years. These days’ women did not change the religion and also practiced the Zoroastrian way of life. Irrespective of their religious belief and practices, women were not accepted by the believers of the community.

Orthodox partial believers persuaded their children not to opt for inter-religious marriages by scaring them. The most common reason cited was cultural incompatibility. They were given examples of unsuccessful inter-religious marriages. Parsis showed the negative aspect of inter-religious marriages so that their children got scared and did not marry outside the community. They tried stopping their children from inter-religious marriages because of social and economic factors. Firstly, they would be criticized by the society for bringing up their children in such manner. This became more of a concern
when priests criticized them. Secondly, their children would not get economic benefits Parsis get as a member of the society, for example scholarships, medical benefits, housing benefits, etc. This persuasion became stronger when parents found their children interacting with non-parsis of the opposite sex. There were cases where parents spied on their children if they found them interacting with non-parsis of the opposite gender. This spying did not stop children from interacting with non-parsis. In many cases, children did marry non-parsis despite all these restrictions. Parents often emotionally blackmailed their children on the basis of religion, to stay away from inter-religious marriages.

"My parents have given me everything in life. They gave me freedom to do anything I want to. They have never asked for anything from me, but one, that I should only marry a Parsi. I can never go against my parents’ will." – Zaren, 25 yrs, Male.

"I have a Hindu girl friend. My parents don’t know about her. I am sure when I will tell at my home; there will be all kinds of blackmail, especially based on religion. I am a very religious person but I can’t marry someone because she was a Parsi. My marrying a Parsi or non-parsi will not change my relationship with God. I am not sure what will I do." – Nevil, 25 yrs, Male.

Orthodox partial believers with younger children started accepting the fact that by the time their children would grow up things would change. There would be fewer number of Parsis and yet fewer young Parsis. This would leave fewer options to marry within the community. There was high probability that children might opt for inter-religious marriages. They would still persuade their children not to go for inter-religious marriages. Though they acknowledged the changing situation but would accept their childrens’ inter-religious marriage only if one parent was a Parsi. These people hoped that their children marry within the community. If their children opted for inter-religious marriages then they would not create an issue, like the previous generation. It was their decision and their life, all they wish was that their children should be happy. This attitude of orthodox partial believers made them reformist partial believers when their children actually married someone outside the religion.
According to the believers the primary reason for the dwindling numbers was inter-religious marriages, especially when women were concerned, because women practiced religion of their husbands. When a woman married a non-parsi she became impure as she got into a relation with a non-parsi. These women were as good as non-parsis and were treated like one and were not accepted inside the Fire Temple. Believers felt that if one had taken the decision to betray one’s religion, that person had no right to again embrace the religion. They should practice the religion of their husbands and if they did not wish to do that then they should never marry outside the religion.

Orthodox partial believers believe that marriage becomes an issue depending on the place where one lives. Marrying a non-parsi was a big issue in Mumbai because the number of Parsis was most in Mumbai whereas in abroad, where their number was less, no one questioned it or made any issue about marrying a non-parsi:

“I have seen this, inter-caste marriage was a big issue in Mumbai, may be because there were more Parsis. My cousin lives in America, where there were less Parsis. He has married a non-parsi. He has got their children's navjote done, those people even go to the Agyari but no one has ever questioned them there.”

– Jasmine. 29 yrs, Female.

Believers felt that Parsis opting for inter-religious marriages depended on the way they were brought up by their parents. They thought that the only way to stop these weddings was to educate the younger generation. If children realized that it was wrong to marry outside they would not marry but that education had to be given at a young age. It was as good as murder. One does not tell their children not to murder because it was a sin. In the same way, one should tell their children not to intermarry with those from other religions:

“We can't stop inter-community marriages. The best way to stop was by education. If people know that it was wrong to marry outside they will not marry but that education has to be given at the young age. There are some things which you will never do, you will not tell your kids not to murder, they don't do it then why intercommunity marriages. For me it’s the same category, you can’t do it, no argument, and no discussion. There are reasons we will give you the reasons. When the souls are of different frequency there could not be any unity of souls. Marriage was ultimately what, unity of souls. The physical and
emotional part was different. There can not be union of souls when the souls are
of different frequency." – Shahzad, 53 yrs, Male.

Despite all the restrictions, believers were not able to reduce the number of people who
opted for inter-religious marriages. They knew that they could not stop these marriages.
Orthodox partial believers started partially accepting non-parsi spouses.

Reformists - Reformists include people who were partial believers and non-believers. They think that spouses of Parsis opted for inter-religious marriages should be accepted in the community as an integrated part of the community. Their reason was not regarding religion but the dwindling numbers. In this scenario, inter-religious marriage was one of the alternatives to save the Parsi community from being extinguished. Reformist partial believers who had been to Iran and lived with Zoroastrians there claimed that inter-religious marriages were acceptable among Zoroastrians in Iran; they should be allowed in India also. These people refused to follow the Hindu norms adopted by Zoroastrians. They considered Zoroastrians of Iran were following absolute Zoroastrianism but Iran is a country ruled by Muslims, and hence one cannot overrule the impact of Muslims on the Zoroastrians staying there.

Parsi women marrying outside the community were considered non-parsis and were not allowed to enter the Fire Temple by believers and orthodox partial believers. Reformists did not like this practice because marrying a non-parsi did not make these women non-parsi. These women were born of Parsi parents and were Parsis; marriage did not change their identity. Many of them know Parsi women who wanted to follow the religion but had to give it up because of boundaries created by orthodox people. Some women had willingly given up practicing social religion because they had to face criticism from believers and orthodox partial believers, which was not acceptable to either them or their spouses. These women did practice personal religion (Zoroastrinism) by praying at home.

Reformist organizations thought that non-parsi females married to Parsi males were treated like untouchables of Hindus. If we consider orthodox perspective, Parsi women married outside the community were considered non-parsis and were treated by believers in the same manner as non-parsis. These women felt bad because they had grown up like
a Parsi and after marriage, were treated like a non-parsi, which was altogether a different experience.

According to reformists, the reason for their dwindling numbers was not inter-religious marriages, but the lesser number of children Parsi couples opted for. Though, the marriages which came to pass earlier were less in number, these marriages never had such an impact on their numbers. It did not have an impact on the demographics to the extent it was having now.

Reformists criticized orthodox Parsis for having a different set of rules for different people. Rich people were exempted from the rules of religion, whereas the poor were not. For example, Ratan Tata and the Wadias (two of the richest Parsis) did marry non-paris and converted their spouses. This was highly criticized when Ratan Tata did this. When the Wadias converted, they were accepted by the priests because he obtained enough money. This acceptance had come from orthodox partial believers. At a personal level, believers never accepted these people in the community. As one informant commented about a world famous pop singer:

"You might have heard of Freddie Mercury. When he died, at that time one of my relatives who was a known priest, refused to conduct his last rites because he never lived his life as a Parsi, e.g. he loved cats, never wore sudreh-kusti and so on." – Tanaz, 51 yrs, Female.

Reformist partial believers did not commented on partial believers but criticized orthodox partial believers for having double standards. They felt that whenever someone married outside the community, they were criticized for being impure because they had relationship with a person who was a non-parsi. At the other end many Parsis had affairs and relationship with non-parsis, some out of wedlock, which were overlooked by orthodox partial believers as long as those people married within the community.

Two priests who were paid by ARZ to conduct marriage rituals for couples opting for inter-religious marriages, only recited the ashirwad prayers which took place on the stage. They did not conduct nahan for the non-parsi spouses as they were not Zoroastrian. As all the rituals did not take place, orthodox people did not recognize such marriages. As it was easy to find a priest, therefore people had no issues performing Parsi rituals for
inter-religious marriages. This easy availability of priests had made it easier for people to get the ceremony done in Parsi style. Since priests were performing the ceremony, Parsis had started accepting the couple.

Unlike orthodox Parsis, reformists accepted non-parsi spouses to a greater extent. Female non-parsi spouses could participate in rituals related to navjote, marriage and death (cremation). The non-parsi spouse could not be part of social religion; they could not enter the Fire Temple or Dhungarwari. At home, restrictions were not that strict. They could touch the prayer area. In some households, the prayer area was shared by the Parsi and the non-parsi spouse. All these changes happened at the individual level.

Opting for inter-religious marriage varied from family to family. In families where parents were open-minded and did not know much about religion, children started questioning the age-old rituals for which parents could not provide satisfactory answers. Children knew their parents would accept them if they married a non-parsi, so they went ahead without any hesitation. Parents also had no issues with inter-religious marriages.

Effect on Demography - The number of males and females opting for inter-religious marriages were almost the same. The increase in inter-religious marriages had forced the community to accept non-parsi spouse to some extent. This had opened doors for people who were scared to take such steps. The acceptance of a non-parsi spouse, especially among the reformists made it easier for non-parsi spouse to survive in the community.

Death

The method of disposal of the dead was also one aspect where believers, partial believers, and non-believers had different perspectives. It had torn the community into thinkers of reformists and orthodox. Due to lack of vultures, reformists were opting for cremation, which was not accepted by orthodox Parsis.

Orthodox – Despite the non-availability of vultures at the Dhungarwari and many controversies going on in the community regarding rotting corpses, believers wanted to be taken to the Dhakhma. They believed that this was the only way by which their souls
could reach the Chinvat bridge. Orthodox partial believers were somewhat not sure what the right method was. They ideally would have liked to be taken to the Dhakhma but some of them were skewed towards cremation. They criticized Reformists, partial believers and non-believers for their attitude towards cremation. Many times believers tried to convince partial believers not to go for cremation. They scared partial believers by reasoning out that this practice was not acceptable in the religion for spiritual reasons. Their soul would suffer for years and would not be able to reach Chinvat because all the rituals were not done properly. At times they were able to convince them but were unsuccessful most of the times.

When non-believers or reformist partial believers opted for cremation, believers and orthodox partial believers did not attend the last rites of these individuals.

Some orthodox partial believers, who had come from other Parsi settlements in India, did not like some of the strict rules followed in Mumbai. They never spoke about these because they wanted to stay away from any kind of controversy and criticism by people.

"After marriage, I came to Mumbai from Navsari. Navsari was one of the oldest Parsi settlements. In Mumbai I don't like the idea that when someone dies, no non-Parsi can see their face. My bai has been working with me since so many years, when I will die she would like to see my face, but she can't. The same was not true in Navsari, where non-Parsis can see the face till nahan. If this practice could be followed in Navsari then why not in Mumbai?" - Aban, 59 yrs, female

Reformists - Reformist partial believers felt that they could reach God if they lead a good life, the rituals would not help them. They believed that their soul could reach Chinvat even without going to the Dhakhma. The four-day long prayers would help them reach God. According to them, more than the rituals, it was the connection with God that they made in this life which would help them reach God. Non-believers wished to opt for cremation because there were no vultures and the Dhokmenashini system was not working, which made it less eco-friendly.

When people opted for cremation, their corpse does not undergo the same rituals which took place in the bangle. Though, the prayers for the dead were said in the same manner as said at the Dhungarwari. Two priests, Framroze Mirza and Khushroo Madan
performed the four-day prayers for the soul. This has made the option of cremation easier for Parsis. Believers criticize these priests for practicing cremation rituals because they think that they publicized this wrong practice. There were priests who did not conduct the initial four-day prayers but took over the later prayers for work. Priests had their own limitations. They were paid less, if they refused to conduct ceremonies for people then considering the number of Parsis opting for cremation, these priests would not have work and they could not make enough money.

Some of them criticize orthodox Parsis on issues of purity. They believed that purity was hypocrisy, with the bodies rotting down at the Dhakhma. Reformists strongly believed that if the system of the dead was not working then Parsis should opt for other means. Orthodox Parsis say, by cremating one was defiling the fire. Reformists argue that if that was the case, then people should not cook food on the fire. Rather tandoori chicken which Parsis ate was defiling the fire more than anything else because the meat and blood fell on the fire.

Some reformists who had been excommunicated criticize believers and orthodox partial believers openly:

"I don't know from where these Parsis get the weird idea of heaven and hell. These Parsis think that they are superior and heaven was only made for them. It's totally absurd. I don't like such superiority attitude." – Ayesha, 25 yrs, Female.

Reformists argued that the Dhokmenashini system came into practice 300 years back. Parsis came to India 1300 years back. What were the Parsis doing before 300 years has become the issue. Priests could not answer this question. People opted for cremation because they felt that the holiness of the system of disposal was no longer there. There was no point opting for the Dhokhmenashini system of disposal of the dead. Some reformists also cited examples from Iran, saying that there was no concept of Dhokmenashini there. Therefore, if the Iranians who were left there did not following such system, then there was no need for them to follow it.

Some reformist partial believers were against cremation because they worshipped fire and believed that cremation defiled the fire. According to them, Parsis should use 'Tower
of Silence’ land for burial. Though, burial pollutes earth, but it was a better option than polluting the Fire.

Reformist partial believers, whose daughters had opted for inter-religious marriages had willingly opted for cremation. They knew that their daughters would not be able to attend the funeral if they went in for the Dhokmenashini system. Therefore, they opted for cremation so that their children could be present with their families for the last rites.

Reformist partial believers criticized believers and orthodox partial believers for hypocrisy. According to them, people who worked at menial jobs at the Dhungarwari were non-parsis. These helpers cleaned areas in which non-parsis were not allowed, for example the bangli. Orthodox Parsis acknowledge that the practice was not right but then they had no other option. These loopholes in the community were points which reformist partial believers used as leverage.

Effect on Demography - Opting for a method of disposal of the dead had no direct influence on demography. People who were open to the idea of cremation were also open to the idea of inter-religious marriages. Here, a similar kind of interaction took place which Berger and Luckmann had described as ‘typificatory schemes’. According to Berger and Luckmann, “The reality of everyday life contains typificatory schemes in terms of which others are apprehended and ‘dealt with’ in face-to-face encounters” (Berger and Luckmann; 1967:45).

Once an individual opted for one kind of change which was against society, they went through a phase of criticism from their relatives and the community. Whenever people encountered these individuals, they behaved in a manner as their mental model suggested. These individuals were expected to take steps which were against the community. In a similar fashion, cremation was not directly affecting the numbers but it was increasing the numbers of reformists, who would be expected to go in for other changes against the community.
To conclude, believers created boundaries by which they tried to excommunicate Parsis who married outside the religion. Some of them shunned people who had opted for inter-religious marriages, which varied from individual to individual.

Parsis who opted for inter-religious marriages were not fully excommunicated, but partially excommunicated. In the case of absolute excommunication, they should not have access to religious institutions but Parsi males went inside the Fire Temple and after death they were also taken to the Dhungarwari. The same was not true for Parsi women a few years back. These days, Parsi women went to the Fire Temple. Though priests criticize them but it did not stop them from going inside the Fire Temple. These women still did not have any right to be inside the Dhungarwari. Personal religion was always practiced by women who married non-parsis. Till an individual wanted, no one could take away their belief. People went to the Fire Temple because they had been praying there since their childhood. Even if someone married outside the community, they had not given up their religion and their belief. These people used laws to scare priests and entered the temple even if others told them not to.

“I know a woman who was married to Hindu. She regularly goes to the Fire Temple. Many a times priest has scolded her not to come but she never listened. The priest even requested her not to enter the Fire Temple. She never listens, rather scares the priest by telling him that it was against law. She is a Parsi and can enter the Fire Temple. The poor chap got scared and cannot do anything. This was not right, she should stop coming to our temple when she should go to her husband’s temple.” – Roshan, 31 yrs, Female.

People who opted for inter-religious marriages had no access to economic institutions. If a Parsi was married to a non-parsi he could not stay in the baag house. This rule was no longer taken seriously. Parsis forcefully stayed in the baag house but they had to fight with the panchayat for their rights.

For believers and orthodox partial believers, social religion decided who was considered a Parsi and who was not. Marriage decided if the person should stay inside or be excommunicated. Some people married outside the community were more religious than
most Parsis who married within the community. Inter-religious marriages made a person impure and hence not accepted by believers and orthodox partial believers.

Though religion was given importance but personal religion became secondary. It should also hold the same importance as social religion. People married outside the religion but practiced it more fervently than those within the religion, should be accepted.

More than religion, it was the economic aspect due to which the non-parsis were not accepted in the community. The philanthropic attitude of their ancestors had made Bombay Parsi Panchayat the second biggest land owners in Mumbai after the government. They had lots of money at their disposal which was used for the benefit of the community members. Members were given scholarships, cheaper housing, cheaper medical facilities, etc. Parsis feared that if they accepted people from other communities, they would encroach and had rights to their property. Leaders established the fear of God to stop people from encroaching into the community.

Most people did not know the religious or spiritual implications of inter-religious marriages. They were more afraid of the social implications.

Navjotes of children from inter-religious marriages were happening. Even if believers and orthodox believers did not like it, they had to accept the changes. Non-believers and reformist partial believers were accepting this change and considering these people as part of the community. They could not stop children from inter-religious marriages participating in social religion, i.e., enter the Fire Temple or Dhungarwari. If the child grew up and married a Parsi, they couldnot deny that child the rights as a member of the community. Though the blood of that child would be impure but he/she would be considered a member of the community.

There was a thin line which divided orthodox partial believers and reformist partial believers. They changed their individuality depending on the situation. The change generally took place from the orthodox partial believer to being a reformist partial believer. This change took place when some close family member married a non-parsi. Once the marriage had taken place, people wanted their children to be accepted by the community. As complete acceptance had not come from believers and orthodox partial believers, people also accepted other changes, like cremation and navjote.
If we look at the demography, it was not only the religion which affected the demography but there were other factors of urbanization which had come across in the research works of other scholars. The PARZOR seminar which was published by A.S. Mama in Parsiana, talked about these factors. Some of these factors were – social acceptance of singles in the community, increase in the number of homosexuals, reduced sex drives, low fertility, high expectations for standards of living, live-in relationships, etc. (Parsiana; 2009). Most of the times, directly or indirectly, the community blamed women for this situation, for example, Jehangir Patel comments, "The Parsi decline was the price the community was paying for its women's education and emancipation," (www.Are Parsis on a path to self-destruction.htm). In such cases, was it right to blame Parsi women for dwindling numbers? Considering religion was given so much of importance regarding marriage, was it not the responsibility of the community to accept women who wanted to follow the religion? Many felt that these were some of the issues which needed to be taken up by the Parsis.

The difference between ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ elements of the community

Deviance in religion happened at various levels – belief, acceptance and social and ritual. The intensity with which it affected the society varied. This also led to rejection by the community which further depended on the way it influenced the overall structure of the community. Many beliefs and rituals were taken from Hindus. Though believers were strongly against them and did not follow them, partial believers followed many of the practices. These beliefs and practices were so much ingrained in their everyday life that everyone accepted them as part of their own rituals and no one raised the issue of these rituals and beliefs being from other communities, e.g. naming ceremony, horoscope matching, etc.

In this section, I will talk about the deviance at the level of society, rituals, and beliefs. My previous chapter on ethnography talked about normal elements and it also mentioned the deviant elements in the community. This section analyzed those aspects.
Belief and Deviance

After coming to India, Parsis had adopted many aspects of Indian culture. The adoption was more at the socio-religious perspective than from the viewpoint of prescribed religion. Staying in a cosmopolitan environment, they could not abstain themselves from following other religions. The change was brought by partial believers. Believers did not accept change. They followed the religion as prescribed in sacred texts. Believers strongly criticized partial believers because they believed ‘other Gods’ more than their own God Zarathushtra:

“Many Parsis believe in Sai Baba because most religions had fixed idols and people tend to worship those idols. In Parsis there is no idol worship so people tend to follow other religions. Moreover, people are very tolerant towards other religions. For some people, they might see something good happening to their friend because of the belief so they tend to follow the same belief, for example, something good happening if people go to a particular Fire Temple on Monday. It was a matter of personal belief, nothing to do with religion. People are not forced to not ‘go’ follow other beliefs normally unlike other religions which discouraged one to look to other religions. Some people also wear threads around their hands and attend Gujarati pujas. It can also happen that some people can narrate their experience to other people that they might have gone to some place and their problem was solved, so other people also follow them.

“My dad was a follower of Sai Baba but my mother brought him back to our religion. I think it was a good thing. I was very happy about it. I respect other religions but at the end I think that my God was powerful enough to give him whatever he wants. There was no point wondering to places. My dad used to say things like other Gods are more powerful but I never liked it because I believe in my religion, there was no point looking for answers in other religions when my religion can give me all the answers.” – Booman, 31 yrs, Male.

The change was brought about by partial believers in the form of idol worship and spirituality. They readily adopted ancient healing system practiced by Hindus, like yoga and Reiki. The most famous non-parsi saints among the Parsis were Sai Baba and Jesus.
One can easily find idols of Sai Baba, Jesus, Agnil Baba, Ganesh, etc., inside households of partial believers.

There were various reasons for following other faiths. One of the most common reasons cited by partial believers was the lack of understanding within their own religion. Parsis were highly educated people. Like any educated and well-informed individuals they searched for answers to phenomena happening around them. Sacred texts and prayers were written in Phallavi and Avesta. Parsis did not understand their prayer books because the prayers were in Avesta. There were priests who had studied the language and had tried to explain the prayers. These scholars attempted to translate the prayers with the help of Sanskrit. Every scholar had their own interpretation. Many times their explanations led to dissatisfaction since priests often contradicted each other. This dissatisfaction led partial believers to follow other religions. People did not know whom to follow and whom not to. When they read sacred texts from other religions, they could easily understand what they prayed about. This made them feel that they were closer to God. When two cultures came together, cultural transmission took place. When partial believers came in contact with other religions, they could make sense of things on their own. They could understand the sacred text and knew what they were praying. It no longer remained blind faith. This comprehension attracted partial believers to other religions. Parsis born and brought up in Gujarat found themselves closer to Indian mythologies like the Bhagawat Gita, Ramayana, and Mahabharata, than their own scriptures. Since their childhood, they knew Hindu Mythology through their education, TV, comics, etc. They found themselves closer to the Hindus than Zoroastrians.

Another reason to follow other faiths was when something life-threatening or good happened to them in the past when they prayed to ‘other Gods.’ After this, they started following other religions. For most people it happened when they saw good things happening to other people. For example, faith in the Sai Baba began when other Parsis friends told success stories about their non-zoroastrian faith. Religion had always given comfort to humans, when people prayed to God they wanted something good in return. When people saw other people getting benefited from other Gods as compared to their Gods, they tended to follow that practice or religion.
Partial believers, who were more inclined towards spirituality, believed that Zoroastrian religion lacked a spiritual understanding of religion. They wanted to go beyond rituals and connect to a greater power. They thought that Zoroastrian religion, at one point of time, became ritualistic. They thought that to connect to God one needed to go beyond the ritualistic aspect of religion, which was the spiritual aspect. Therefore, they started following spiritual leaders. Priests told people that prayers had vibrations which were helpful in making connections with God. People did not believe in these things because they had found these vibrations through their spiritual quest in other religions. People followed other religions for the kinds of spiritual development which they could not get within Zoroastrian religion.

Somehow people who were more inclined towards spirituality were more ready to accept change than the orthodox Parsis. The faith increased when positive changes came into their lives. Some of them felt that they obtained power to predict the future and cure diseases. Many times only one individual in the family followed such faith. They had tried to convince their family members but often did not meet success. There were people who followed other religions but later realized the power of prayers in their own religion and gave up other religion.

Partial believers picked up bits and pieces from ‘other religion’ as per their understanding, somewhat like Schutz’s idea of ‘stock-knowledge-at-hand.’ These bits and pieces were integrated within Zoroastrian religion and remained within, almost like a sub-religion. Partial believers daily prayed to ‘other Gods’ along with the Zoroastrian prayers. They kept fast on Thursdays because it was the day of Sai Baba. People who believed in Jesus attended Sunday mass and went to church. Some partial believers said that they had found peace when they worshipped other Gods. They could follow two faiths without being criticized by community members. They had equated this with acceptance from members of other religions. Followers of spirituality also picked up bits and pieces of religion, like a *bricolage,* but they did not entirely give up ritualistic aspects of Zoroastrian religion. Zoroastrian prayers and spiritual practices went hand in hand. For example, meditation might start with either kasti prayers or Ashem Vahu. They found peace in spirituality and meditation and felt that they were getting connected to the prophet.
“Whenever I start my meditation, I do kusti because kusti was for spiritual purification.” – Daiyas, 48 yrs, Male.

According to some scholars, there was no concept of rebirth, as per Zoroastrian theology. Some scholars thought that idea of rebirth did not exist only if one followed all the tenets of Zoroastrianism. As people did not follow Zoroastrianism in all aspects, they had to take rebirth. Most partial believers thought that there was no rebirth in Zoroastrianism but as an individual they did believe in rebirth. Most partial believers had internalized the idea of karma which was adopted from Hinduism.

Parsis believed a lot in horoscopes and in finding out the auspicious time, though there was no concept of auspicious time in their religion. Most Parsis got their horoscope made and shown it to people who were considered masters in predicting future. They had also kept horoscopes and used it during match-making. Believers never considered horoscopes because the idea was taken from Hinduism. Orthodox partial believers didn’t have their horoscopes made but considered auspicious time when they had to go for some good work. This auspicious time was given in the calendar and it followed the Gujarati system. Reformist partial believer did believe in Horoscope and often showed them to Hindu astrologers. Non-believers did not believe in these things.

**Ritual Deviance**

Some reformist partial believers had adopted the faith to the extent that they had given up some aspects of personal religion. They had not given up social religion, for instance, rituals like Jashan, ashu-mishu, etc. were often not done, but they participated in social religion and conducted the rites of passage ceremonies – navjote, marriage, and death. These Parsis believed that in India priests did not follow the right faith. They followed what they had adopted from India and not the actual Zoroastrian faith. These Parsis were more open to the concept of inter-religious marriages and accepting children born from such marriages.

Elder people felt bad when younger generation did not pray. Parents did not force their children to pray. This gave children the liberty to pray in whichever form they wanted to.
When children asked questions about their prophet, parents generally did not know all the answers. When the child was growing up, religious education was given less importance as compared to other activities. Due to this, religious exposure of the children became lesser as compared to that of the parents. Many times, grandparents tried to educate their children but did not always have same impact because grandparents interacted less with children. Children had given up reciting prayers because they did not understand them as they were in a different language.

As said earlier, partial believers picked up things they thought were right. Some of them did not wish to waste their money on rituals. They preferred to donate money for better causes, as explained by an informant:

"I did Muktad ceremony for my dead husband for five years. The ceremony costs minimum of Rs. 10,000. I realized that priests were not very serious about the ceremony and it was wastage of money. The flowers and vase are thrown after the ceremony and is of no use for living. So I decided I will not waste my money on rituals, I will donate the amount every year for orphans. I think it was better to donate and help needy people instead of wasting money in these ceremonies. My husband was a nice man, I am sure his soul was in peace." – Meher, 55 yrs, Female.

It was very important that people did all the good things in an auspicious time. They got to know about the auspicious time from the Parsi calendar. Believers did not follow the system because it was not Zoroastrian. In Zoroastrianism there was no aspect of auspicious time. Partial believers followed this practice because it was an age old custom and many people followed it.

"There was no harm in following such things. If everyone was following it, then there must be something." – Zubin, 36 yrs, Male.

Before entering the Fire Temple, some partial believers also did not do kusti because they had already had a bath at home and thought that they were pure.
Social Deviance

Reformist partial believers who accepted other religions readily also accepted change in the community faster as compared to other people. Orthodox partial believers did not opt for any social change because they were scared of criticism from the community members. These people became reformist partial believers when someone close to the family opted for an inter-religious marriage.

Parsi women who had married outside the community were excommunicated. A decade back these women did not follow their religion of birth because they were not accepted and were ex-communicated by the community. These women, in turn, started following the religion of their spouse. With the acceptance from community members to participate in community functions, they had started going to the Fire Temple also. Some priests discouraged these people by insulting them but this did not prevent these women from following their faith.

Reformists thought that the ideas of orthodox people were not always right. Orthodox people said that the fire became defiled when a non-parsi entered the Fire Temple. Reformists thought that it was not possible, if in the mere presence of a non-parsi fire was defiled, it meant that a non-parsi was more powerful than the fire. They believed that orthodox Parsis were doing similar things as to what Hindu Brahmins did to the dalits. They were not allowed into the temple because they polluted it. They argued when these restrictions were not followed in Iran, then why was this practice followed in India. This was because of the history of the Parsis. They had witnessed so many attacks which led to the destruction of their community. Every time, somehow, they had managed to preserve their community. When they came to India, they created these boundaries to preserve their ethnicity and religion.

Non-believers and reformist partial believers also accepted partial conversion. Though, all the three groups were against taking converts from other communities, but reformist partial believers and non-believers accepted children from one Parsi parent, irrespective of gender.

Non-believers and reformist partial believers opted for cremation. This practice was highly criticized by believers and orthodox partial believers.
‘Deviant’ aspects of religion and its impact on ethnicity, identity, boundary-making mechanisms, and excommunication

To start with this section, I would like to give definition of ethnicity and identity. According to Jenkins:

- “Ethnicity is about cultural differentiation (bearing in mind that identity is always a dialectic between similarity and difference);”
- “Ethnicity is concerned with culture – shared meaning – but it is also rooted in, and the outcome of, social interaction;”
- “Ethnicity is no more fixed than the culture of which it is component, or the situations in which it is produced and reproduced;”
- “Ethnicity is both collective and individual, external in social interaction and internalized in personal self-identification” (Jenkins; 1997:165).

As I mentioned in the last section, deviance leads to acceptance and rejection in the community. This created identity issues among community members. In India, members of this community were always called Parsis by fellow community members. They were never addressed as Zoroastrians, though some books had called them ‘Zoroastrians of India’. But was that what the Parsi community was? Does that mean that all Zoroastrians of India can be labeled as Parsis? The answer is ‘NO’.

When the group of Zoroastrians came to India from Iran, 1300 years back, they were known as Parsis because they came from a place called Pars. There was no distinction between religion and ethnicity. Kulke rightly called Parsis as, ‘ethno-religious minority in India’ (Kulke: 1978: 13). In 19th century, when another group of people came to India from Iran, they were known as Iranis. After the Iranis came to India, there came a distinction between ethnicity and religion within the community. Zoroastrians were divided into two groups, Parsi Zoroastrian and Irani Zoroastrians. These two groups had always lived in harmony in India. To other communities, Parsis and Iranis were ‘Parsis’, there was no distinction between the two. These two groups also did not carry different identities in front of other communities, they called themselves Parsis.

Parsis identified with their communities’ glorious past and rapport their ancestors had created with other communities. Other communities always saw them as rich and prosperous community. They were considered the most westernized as compared to other
communities in Mumbai. Being part of the community gave one a high standard of living and one had to maintain this standard. Being Parsi was like having a trump card. If a person was born as a Parsi, most of the socio-economical problems were solved due to charities set up by their ancestors, as a result of which they got to study in good schools. If they wished to go for higher education, they had trusts that provided scholarships. Parsi businessmen preferred to employ Parsis. As a result of the kind of rapport they shared with other communities, people preferred to employ Parsis for trustworthy jobs. They were considered truthful and harmless people. Parsis were considered to be very humble. After Independence, they had not become involved in any riots. During any Hindu-Muslim riots, no one harmed a Parsi because of the rapport they had among these communities.

Identity outside the community

Parsis were an integrated part of India, like their famous anecdote of ‘sugar and milk’. They were truly like sugar, without which milk was tasteless. They respected the way India gave shelter to their ancestors and Indians had accepted them in their nation. They were extremely proud of their heritage and glorious past, and the contributions their ancestors made towards the development of the community and nation. The philanthropic attitude of their ancestors influenced the progress of the nation. They had adopted a major part of local culture, their language, dress, food, customs, etc. To the extent that their rituals were more or less like Hindus. The cultural transmission happened to the extent that they considered themselves as Caste. They referred to members of other communities as Parjats. When they talked about inter-religious marriages, they mostly use the term – inter-caste marriages. During my interviews, I was asked by two Parsi priests – “What is your caste?” I answered them – “I am a Hindu.” This answer satisfied them and without any further probing, they continued with the interview.

Despite of all the above factors and spending so many years in India, believers and partial believers could not identify themselves as Indians. They always said, “We are from Iran, we are Iranis”. They had somehow not accepted India as their homeland. They had an inherent desire to go back to Iran. Most rich Parsis had visited Iran at least once in their
lifetime. Middle class and poor Parsis desired to go to Iran. They felt very proud when they referred to the Persipolis. Some believers were of the idea that their prophet would come in 2020 AD, when mass destruction would take place of the community and the prophet would take the pure Parsis back to Iran.

There are considered a different group by Parsis and other communities. As written on page 98, they are considered closed group. Other people also consider them cynic and eccentric. Some of them think that they are high headed and snobbish. At the same time they are considered ‘very rich’. People have often commented “They are rich people”. Many times people had asked me, “Are all Parsis rich?” Other communities have skewed perception about Parsis; they think that every Parsi is rich. When we look at Luhrmann’s book “The Good Parsi”, it seems that she has talked about the affluent Parsis.

According to Parsis, they were well-educated and well-mannered community as compared to other communities of Mumbai. They considered other communities as ill-mannered and thought that they were superior to other communities. Partial orthodox believers felt that there was something superior about the Parsi genes which made them good and different from other communities. They were more polite and had given a lot of help in the development of the country. These rare genes should be preserved and not mixed with other genes. Parsi couples should have more children. Though some Parsis did accept that Parsis were ‘crazy’ but they did not like the way they were portrayed in various movies. This had a negative impact on their image in front of other communities.

Due to this image, they were also mocked by their non-parsi friends.

They did accept disputes within the community, but did not like it when the media publicized these issues. Their identity as a Parsi had given them respect from other community members because of their glorious past. When the media publicized disputes within the community, it hampered that image, which most Parsis did not appreciate, as was seen from this informant’s comment:

“I don’t think there was something wrong in inter-religious marriages but I don’t like issues to be created by press on such marriages. It leaves a bad impression in front of other communities.” – Gandhi, 37 yrs, Male.

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At the same time, believers felt that community had undergone downfall since a few decades. There were times, when Parsis were respected to the extent that they did not have to take oath in court of Law because they were considered trustworthy. For the same reason, they were given responsible jobs especially when it required dealing with finances. Believers related the progress of community with their religious orientation. According to them, downfall of the community happened because Parsis were no more religious. Due to which evil could easily attack the community and community was at a non-pleasant state. They did not have the same reputation and economic wealth, which they had in the past.

Identity within the community

Parsis staying in baags could relate to the community more than the Parsis staying out of the baags. Parsis living in baags liked the environment they were brought up in. The opportunities they had obtained because they were part of the community were one thing they always remembered. The schools they had studied in had helped them grow as an individual. The similar customs and rituals they followed identified them with the community, for example wearing the sudreh-kusti. Irrespective of name, any person could recognize a Parsi with a sudreh-kusti because their names were often close to Muslim names.

All religious items were made by Parsis and used by Parsis. No non-parsi can use them because they would get impure. For example, sudreh, kusti, topi (prayer cap) was made by Parsis because these Parsis were pure. Partial believers and non-believers were fine if non-parsi wanted to buy such things and use them, but believers were totally against the practice.

Depending on the place of residence, Parsis often identified themselves. Mumbai is divided into two major areas – Mumbai City and Mumbai suburban district. Mumbaikars, often refer Mumbai city as ‘Town’ or ‘South Mumbai’ and Mumbai suburban district as ‘Suburbs’. Parsis living in town and suburbs carry different identities amongst themselves. Parsis living in town think that they are superior to Parsis living in suburbs and considered suburbs Parsis as less polished and ill-mannered Parsis. Parsis living in
suburbs considered Town Parsis as high-headed and snobbish. Staying in a baag in Mumbai City was a matter of pride. Parsis would try their best that they did not leave that accommodation in any circumstance.

Parsis identify themselves with certain criteria which makes a Parsi. These comments were made by Parsis (In India and abroad) on social networking site – Orkut. Though these comments were made by insiders, are made by outsider but insiders could identify with them and outsiders consider it as joke. Some of these comments are:

- "Your mom wakes you up extra early on the first day of school/your Parsi birthday so that she can do tilli and sagaan. You go to school and your friends ask you why the hell you have rice in your hair"
- "You compulsively drink tea at all hours of the day [In India you wake up your servants at 3 am and tell them to make you tea]"
- "You know the precise definition of benchod and madderchod and you teach them to your friends"
- "You're off the marriage market if you get too tan. However, if you're fair enough, it doesn't matter what you look like or how smart you are, you'll get a decent spouse"
- "You know at least 3 ways to use oil. Only 2 of which include cooking"
- "You've had to drink cow piss at least once in your life"
- "You've had to change your clothes in front of 400 people, while your mom and the rest of the women in the family were holding up a cloth so that nobody could see you"
- "You've had to pull off wearing 5-9 yards of silk wrapped around you"
- "You've had the equivalent of at least one peg of brandy by age 10"
- "Your parents have decided who you should marry by age 10. Aunties have seen you as Vohu [daughter-in-law] material since age 5"
- "You're ridiculously pampered if you're a boy, especially the first boy"
- "Nobody can ever pronounce your name and/or last name properly"
- "When ordering a drink at Starbucks you've give a name that is pronounceable to the American public. Ex. Phiroze becomes Phil"
• You give your dog a tili on his/her birthday
• You buy a new car and the first things you do:
  o You take an egg, spin it around the car seven times and throw the egg on
    the ground
  o You put a tili on all 4 tires and on the front bumper
  o You roll over some lemons and eggs with the tires
• You eat at least 3 eggs a day but will still probably live into your 90's
• You've been asked why there's a "string" hanging from the back of your shirt
• Indians never believe you when you say you're from there
• If you marry a 'parjat' [non-parsi] your parents will disown you for a year or two
  but then eventually come around, though never entirely
• More than likely your last name ends in -walla, -wala, -vala, or -ia
• Your last name also more than likely means some type of profession or where
  you're from
• You've felt the need to snap three times when somebody says something bad or
  when there's anything that might suggest Ahriman's [the devil's] influence
• You'd be skinned alive if you ever wore black to a wedding, navjote or your own
  birthday party
• Our idea of a blessing is to have a bunch of rice and rose petals pelted at you
• You've been told never to eat fish with yogurt
• Never cut your hair on Hormaz roj
• You are vegetarian on certain days
• You'd pick yellow gold over any metal any day
• You celebrate New Year 3 times a year. Once on January 1st with the rest of the
  world. Once in Spring for Navroze, and once in August for Pateti
• You have two birthdays and get presents on both days
• If you're a girl, you've mastered the fine art of cutting an onion by age 9
• You've had a cold and been forced to drink milk and haldi, which didn't even help
  your cold but on top of that gave you a stomach ache
• If you're a boy, your mom has to teach you to do laundry when you go to college or you just save it until you come home
• You know about the mystical powers of 4711 Eau de Cologne... AKA COLOGNE WATER because Parsis can't speak French if their life depended on it, and yet you have a bizarre love for all things British or French
• Your parents make you drink brandy when you're sick, and whisky if they think you might be getting sick
• Your friends come to a Parsi party and think you have a ridiculously huge family because you call everyone, auntie or uncle
• You give your dogs either parsi names or name them after alcohol (i.e. Brandy, Whiskey, Rum, Sherry, Gin, etc.)
• You use expressions like "Khodai!" or "Bapre" or "Oh mari maire" all the time."

It would not be wrong to say that their religion (Zoroastrian) and ethnicity (Parsi) were used as synonyms for Parsis. But did all Parsis or Zoroastrians of India think that way? The perspective of believers, partial believers, and non-believers were very distinct. The criteria, regarding what constituted and did not constitute a Parsi was very blurred within the community. The reason was that the acceptance level differed from believers, partial believers, and non-believers. In the forthcoming paragraphs I would explain the boundaries made by Parsis – Who was accepted by whom and reasons behind the acceptance.

When we talked about identity within the community members, there were different perspectives. As I had mentioned earlier, ethnicity and religion were used synonymously when it came to the Parsis, but recently, there had been distinct viewpoints on this issue. Religion and ethnicity were considered different by some members of the community. This differentiation led them to prefer either religious identity or ethnic identity.

Believers differentiated between religious identity and ethnic identity. For them ethnicity was more important than religion. Given an option between being Zoroastrian and being Parsi, they preferred to call themselves Parsis over Zoroastrians. Believers felt that they
have stayed in India for long, and have set of beliefs and practices, which made them Parsis. Believers preferred ethnic identity over religious identity.

Most partial believers saw no difference between religious identity and ethnic identity. When asked about preference between Zoroastrians or Parsis. They did not differentiate between the two; they called themselves as Parsi Zarathushties. Though, orthodox partial believers were skewed towards ethnic identity whereas reformist partial believers were skewed towards religious identity.

For non-believers, religious identity and ethnic identity was distinct. Non-believers thought that the survival of the community was more important than survival of the religion because religion could only survive if there were followers. Their decisions based on social religion were influenced more by religion than by ethnicity. Given a choice of identity between Parsis or Zoroastrians, non-believers always identified themselves as Zoroastrians. Parsi was the social tag they had obtained because they were born into a Parsi family. They believed that priests in India molded the religion as per their convenience and they did not follow Zoroastrianism preached by Zarathushtra. Non-believers preferred religious identity over ethnic identity. They preferred to call themselves Zoroastrians than Parsis, but used facilities given to Parsis by Panchayat. As Jenkins rightly said, “Ethnic Identity is transactional and changeable, is really to say that it may be; it doesn’t mean that it always is, or has to be.” (Jenkins; 1997:51).

This issue of religious identity and ethnic identity became more of a concern when conversions and inter-religious marriages took place.

Due to inter-religious marriages, the boundaries were blurred. I had already discussed the acceptance of non-parsi spouses in the second section of this chapter. As discussed in second section of analysis, women marrying outside the community were not accepted as Parsis by believers and orthodox partial believers of the community, but unlike the previous generation, most of these women had not converted to their spouse’s religion. Even after marrying a non-parsi, they did identify themselves as a Parsi. They were also identified by their spouse’s family as a Parsi. These women went to the Fire Temple and continuously prayed in the Zoroastrian manner. They were accepted by non-believers and reformist partial non-believers as Parsis. They were very much part of rituals which took
place within the family. Some of them had not converted to the religion of the spouse because if they converted, they would not be able to touch the dead body of their parents. They had kept *sudreh-kasti* so that they could attend the funerals of their close relatives.

As far as conversion was concerned, it took place in Zoroastrianism across the world and it had not left Indian Parsis untouched. Indian Zoroastrians strongly opposed the idea and made their stand clear regarding conversions. All Parsis in India were against conversions because of political and economical reasons. Parsis feared that if they accepted conversions, then people from other communities would convert to share the good rapport Parsis had with other communities.

*Bombay Parsi Panchayat* had played a major role in maintaining these boundaries. In the past, Lady Tata who was married to an affluent Parsi family was converted. At that time, the *panchayat* fought the case against TATA Family. The *panchayat* won the case and the right to Parsi property and institution were not given to Lady Tata. (Hinnels; 2008: 8-9)

Though orthodox partial believers were against conversions, they did accept people born from inter-religious marriages who did menial jobs at religious institutions. Believers were absolutely against the practice, but the fact was that no Parsi would do such menial jobs, they had to accept at least ‘half-parsis’ than employing absolute non-parsis in their religious institutions.

Within India, all Parsis did not wish to attract converts from any other religion. From a common man’s perspective, *navjote* was an initiation ceremony, which made a child Zoroastrian. As per believers, *navjote* of the children born of Parsi mothers and non-parsi fathers was also conversion. Moreover, the *navjote* of adopted children was also conversion. Believers and orthodox partial believers were against these *navjotes*, to the extent that believers never attended such *navjotes*.

Reformist partial believers and non-believers supported these *navjotes*. They argued that, for the survival of the community, *navjotes* of children born from Parsi mothers and non-parsi fathers should be done. For them, religion was more important than ethnicity. Reformist leaders wanted people to accept children from inter-religious marriages. They felt that spouses of inter-religious marriages should be converted if they wanted to
practice the religion. These people could be converted to Zoroastrianism so that they
could practice religion but could never become Parsis so that they could not access to the
ancestral property of Parsis, which was feared by orthodox Parsis.

The view is supported by Jenkins, according to him, "There are limits to the plasticity of
ethnicity, as well as to its fixity and solidity, is the founding premise for the development
of an understanding of ethnicity which permits us to appreciate that although it is
imagined, it is not imaginary; to acknowledge its antiquity as well as its modernity.
Rethinking demands that we should strike a balance view of the authenticity of ethnic
attachment of ethnic attachments. Somewhere between irresistible emotion and utter
criticism, neither blindly primordial or completely manipulable, ethnicity and its
allotropes are principle of collective identification and social organization in terms of
culture and history, similarity and difference, that show little signs of withering away. In
itself this is neither a 'good thing' nor a 'bad thing'. It is probability just very human. It
is hard to imagine the social world in their absence" (Jenkins; 1997:169-170).

Thus, institutionally also, Parsis supported the idea of partial belief as a structured
category within themselves, each group having differential rights. Unfortunately, though
structured and used, this was never codified into law, thus allowing for flexibility and
subjective changes in these categories over time.