



Folk Culture in the Age of Globalization: Changing Traditions in Contemporary Bangladesh

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Abstract

Bangladesh is a region rich in folk traditions and culture since ancient times and developed as the main content of Bengali ethnicity. Folk culture is not a static thing historically, but rather it is dynamic with the changes in society and culture. Bengali folk culture, including Bhawaiyya, Bhatiali, Nakshi Kantha, folk literature and linguistics represents a rich cultural heritage. In the age of globalization, the spread of social and mass media has brought about a huge change in the practice of folk culture in the overall global culture. New trends can be observed in the practice, acceptance, rejection, preservation of recent folk culture, as well as in the transfer of cultural heritage. The main objectives of this article analyze how the new generation is accepting or rejecting the determinants of past and present traditions. The capitalist market system and digital media displaying past traditions as a product, which has influenced the thinking of generations. There is a lack of research on the interaction of folk culture with modern society. Many elements of folk culture have almost reached the verge of extinction. Folk culture of ethnographic standards is not just a memory of the past; it is a resistance force to adapt to contemporary society. Socio-economic and technological innovations have accelerated the change. The influence of Western art among the young generation has taken the form of a new reform in the combination of the existing culture of the country and global elements. The influence of social media as a part of higher education and modern lifestyle is affecting the regional trend in the rising generation and leaning towards Western mannerism. The proper preservation to prevent extinction of folk culture, the thoughts and consciousness of the young generation are the main theme of this article.

Keywords: Folk Culture and Globalization, Cultural Transformation, Tradition and Modernity, Cultural Identity, Western Intrusion and Hybridization.

1. Introduction

The folk culture of Bangladesh is a rich, life-centric cultural expression that has evolved through the country's long historical, social, economic and religious development. Factors such as the riverine landscape, an agriculture-based lifestyle, the rural social structure, the coexistence of diverse ethnic groups and the mutual influence of Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and other religious-cultural traditions have endowed Bangladesh's folk culture with multidimensional characteristics. Fundamentally, this culture has been transmitted from generation to generation through the lifestyles, beliefs, rituals and festivals of the common people.

In ancient Bengali society, the intimate relationship between people and agriculture, rivers and nature played a pivotal role in the evolution of folk culture. Various folk beliefs, customs and festivals emerged from the cycle of seasons, crop production, rainfall, riverine life and diverse rural experiences. Traditions such as Nabanna, Poush-Parban, Gajan and the Baishakhi festival reflect this life deeply rooted in agriculture and nature.

Another significant feature of Bangladesh's folk culture is its oral tradition. Before the spread of formal education, knowledge, values and social experiences were passed down through stories, fables, legends, riddles, proverbs and folk tales. Mymensingh Gitika, Gazir Gaan, Palagaan, Jari, Sari, Bhatiali, Baul and Marfati songs stand as important hallmarks of Bangladeshi folk heritage.

Religious and cultural interactions have also played a crucial role in shaping the folk culture of Bangladesh. With the spread of Islam during the medieval period, the influences of Sufi saints, Pirs, and Aulias, along with various folk beliefs, blended with the local culture. Simultaneously, numerous elements of Hindu and Buddhist traditions persisted in various forms within folk life. Consequently, syncretic and pluralistic cultural characteristics are evident in the folk culture of Bangladesh.

Folk arts and crafts also constitute a vital part of this cultural backdrop. Art forms such as Nakshi Kantha (embroidered quilts), pottery, bamboo and cane crafts, Shitalpati (cool mats), Patachitra (scroll paintings), woodwork and handloom weaving reflect the creativity, philosophy of life, and aesthetic sensibilities of rural people. While many of these crafts once served the practical needs of daily life, a significant number of them are now regarded as symbols of heritage and cultural identity.

However, the folk culture of Bangladesh is not static or immutable. Urbanization, industrialization, modern education, mass media, technology, the internet, globalization and the market economy have transformed the ways in which folk culture is practiced and expressed. Many folk traditions are being presented through new mediums, while others are gradually weakening or facing the risk of extinction. In particular, shifts in the lifestyles and cultural preferences of the younger generation have brought the future preservation and revitalization of folk culture into sharp focus.

2. Concept of Folk Culture

Folk culture is a cultural heritage that emerges from the lives of the people, is socially practiced, transmitted across generations and evolves over time. Its key characteristics include orality, intergenerational transmission, collectivity, local rootedness, a close connection to daily life, reliance on belief, spontaneity and fluidity. Folk culture is a vital element in understanding the social and cultural identity of Bangladesh. It encompasses the traditional cultural forms that emerge spontaneously from the lives of ordinary people shaped by long-standing social experiences, beliefs, customs, language, arts, dietary habits are passed down from generation to generation.

In the context of Bangladesh, folk culture includes Baul songs, Bhatiali, Bhawaiya, Jari and Sari songs, Palagaan, folktales, proverbs and sayings, riddles, folk dances, Nakshi Kantha (embroidered quilts), pottery, bamboo and cane crafts, rural fairs, Nabanna (harvest festival), Pitha-puli (traditional cakes) and various folk rituals and beliefs.¹

A significant portion of folk culture is unwritten; it is preserved and disseminated orally examples include folktales, proverbs, rhymes and folk songs. Folk culture is typically passed from one generation to the next through family and social education. Many elements of folk culture are shaped by the long-standing collective experiences and creativity of communities rooted in a folk lifestyle. Variations in the forms and characteristics

of folk culture are observed across different regions. Distinctive folk cultural traits exist in the northern regions, riverine areas, hilly tracts and coastal zones of Bangladesh. Folk culture is not static; its forms evolve under the influence of time, technology, urbanization, education, mass media and globalization. Reflection of beliefs and values: Folk beliefs, religious concepts, social values, ethics and philosophies of life are reflected in the various elements of folk culture. Folk culture is not merely a source of entertainment; It is directly linked to people's work, festivals, social relationships and daily lives. Folk culture embodies and preserves the historical memory, social identity, and cultural heritage of a community.

3. Cultural Globalization and Folk Traditions

Globalization has brought about both positive and negative changes in Bangladeshi culture. Its impact is particularly noticeable in language, clothing, dietary habits, music, cinema, entertainment, lifestyle, values and folk culture. Globalization through the internet, social media, foreign films, music and international media has expanded opportunities for cultural exchange. Consequently, Bangladeshi culture is reaching global audiences via digital platforms. Under the influence of markets and popular culture, some folk traditions have faced commercialization, transformation, or partial disappearance. Western clothing, international fashion trends and social media are influencing the clothing choices of young people in Bangladesh. At the same time, traditional attire such as the sari, panjabi, salwar-kameez and jamdani has integrated with modern fashion through new designs and marketing strategies. The impact is also visible in the dietary habits of the youth. The use of the English language has increased due to the internet, social media and international education systems. While this has enhanced opportunities for international communication, it has also sparked new discussions regarding the correct usage of Bangla and the preservation of indigenous linguistic diversity. Foreign music has become easily accessible to the people of Bangladesh through satellite television, YouTube, Facebook, streaming platforms and other digital media. Bangladeshi artists are adopting international musical styles, leading to the creation of new genres through fusion and the blending of different musical forms.

New concepts regarding individualism, professional freedom, gender roles, education, career paths, and consumer culture have entered Bangladeshi society. The influence of global culture is particularly evident in the leisure activities, social relationships and future plans of urban youth. Folk arts, handicrafts, traditional clothing, folk music and festivals have become linked to tourism and commerce. Folk songs, tales and traditions that were once confined to specific geographical regions can now be preserved through video, audio, digital archives and social media.

This serves as a vital medium for transmitting Bangladesh's cultural heritage to the new generation. In the context of Bangladesh's cultural landscape, it is insufficient to view globalization merely as a process of cultural erasure or solely as a positive force for modernization. Rather, it is a process of transformation, adaptation, hybridization and reconstruction. While many elements of Bangladeshi folk culture have undergone changes under the pressure of globalization, they are simultaneously finding new life through new technologies, mass media and international connectivity.²

Folk art originated from necessity; aesthetic elements were incorporated later. In folk art, the artist's mindset takes precedence. Indigenous folk artist communities without formal training acquire knowledge from their ancestors and surroundings; by considering societal needs and utility and employing their intellect and intuition, they create traditional, functional art forms. Thus, folk art represents our artistic expression spanning ages. Daily life necessitates various objects, which artisans with limited formal education have long produced using simple tools and natural ease. Simultaneously, items influenced by religious rituals, vows (brata) and folk culture have gained widespread acceptance. Nakshi Kantha (embroidered quilts), Nakshi Pitha (ornamental cakes), Alpona (floor art) and embroidery are crafted by the women of Bengal with artistic flair, while men have long produced pottery, bamboo and cane crafts, and bell-metal (bronze) wares. The history of the origin, influence, development and evolution of Bengal's folk art is ancient. An analysis of the nature of folk art reveals that centuries ago, its creation and practice were deeply intertwined with social life; while born of practical necessity, the pursuit of aesthetic appeal and emotional satisfaction also played a significant role. Folk art encompasses diverse categories such as architectural art, folk painting, structural and clay sculpture, folk dance, ritual-based pottery, dolls and toys, household items, textiles, simple furniture and objects linked

to religious folk beliefs. These are further classified into metalwork, bamboo and cane crafts, jute crafts, pottery, folk painting, embroidery, woodwork, culinary arts and architecture.³ In essence folk art arose from necessity, with aesthetics added subsequently. The practice was sustained by the inspiration to maintain a hereditary artistic lineage, mutual respect and a sense of commitment. The defining characteristic of folk art is the expression of the human aesthetic sense through symbols and motifs that is, through designs. Without entering into debates regarding the specific stage of civilization in which folk art originated, it can be stated unequivocally that creative works and artisans emerged out of necessity; the driving force behind this was a conscious effort regarding life and livelihood, coupled with creative, innovative power. This creativity often manifested through various motifs, such as vibrant trees, flowering vines, lotus flowers, betel leaves, kalka (paisley) patterns, geometric designs and depictions of animals and birds. Rural areas formed the primary landscape for folk art in Bangladesh, and the folk artists were essentially working-class people. In the pre-Muslim era, the foundations of rural crafts, household arts and painting had already been laid in the ancient regions of Bengal such as Pundra, Suhma, Bangal, Samatata, Harikela and Tamralipti dating back to prehistoric times. Around 400 BCE, Panini acknowledged the significance of these rural crafts, categorizing artistic works into two distinct types: rural art and royal art. Folk art primarily developed based on local materials and the surrounding environment.⁴

Folk culture refers to the collective body of lifestyles, beliefs, values, rituals, knowledge, art, literature, music, language, dietary habits, attire, craftsmanship and social customs of the common people within a specific community or society. It primarily evolves and is transmitted from generation to generation through oral tradition, imitation and social practice outside the realm of formal education.⁵

Characteristics of folk heritage include: transmission across generations, collective practice, preservation primarily through oral tradition, variation based on location and community, evolution and adaptation over time, connection to the identity and cultural memory of a community and transformation under the influence of modernity and globalization. Notable examples of Bangladesh's folk heritage include Baul songs, Bhawaiya, Gambhira, Nakshi Kantha, Patachitra, folktales, Pala-gan, Nabanna (harvest festival), Pitha-Puli (traditional cakes), rural fairs, folk dances, proverbs and various regional rituals.

Folk art emerged out of necessity, aesthetics were added later. Attitude prevails in folk art. Indigenous northern folk artists, without formal education, derive knowledge from their ancestors and surroundings, consider the needs and usefulness of the people of the society, and create art through traditional, visible application of religion and psychology.⁶ It can be said that folk art is the artistic expression of our era. Human use has required many materials in daily activities of life, which semi-educated or less educated artists have been producing folk products using simple tools and ease. At the same time, other materials are acceptable everywhere under the influence of religious folklore and folk culture. Nakshi Kantha Nakshi Pitha Alpana Embroidery is made with the sweetness of the mind of Bengali women, on the other hand, the men of the male society have been creating pottery, bas and cane works, bronze and metal works for ages. The history of the origin, influence, development and evolution of Bengali folk art is very ancient. An analysis of the nature of folk art shows that hundreds of years ago, the creation of Bengali folk art was very close to the customs and social life, which was created by the needs of practical life and the issue of achieving mental satisfaction to make it appealing with a touch of beauty has also gained importance. The classification of folk art includes architectural art, folk painting, architecture and pottery, folk dance, ritual-oriented pottery, doll toys, household items, clothing, general furniture, and religious folk beliefs, which are divided into metal-made folk art, bamboo and cane art, jute art, pottery, folk painting, embroidery, wood art, culinary art, and architectural art. In other words, it can be said that folk art originated from necessity, and aesthetics were added later.⁷ In the case of folk art, the motivation to continue the hereditary art creation trend was mutual respect and a kind of responsibility. The main identity of folk art is the expression of people's sense of beauty through symbols and motifs, that is, designs. Without going into any debate in this discussion about the stage of civilization at which folk art was created, it can be said without a doubt that creative work and workers were created out of necessity, the main motivation of which was the conscious effort of life and livelihood and the creative and innovative power.

4. Transformation of Folk Culture

By analyzing the major strands of Bengal's rich and diverse folk art, one can trace the history of their origins and evolution. Key factors in the development of this art include the riverine geography, the evolution of diverse communities, traditional rituals and beliefs, the structure of rural society, the agrarian economy and the contours of a class-divided society. In essence, these art forms originated from three fundamental needs: earning a livelihood, invoking auspiciousness while warding off evil and ensuring the survival of the community. The tradition of painting in Bengal flourished through the decoration of everyday objects. This is clearly evident in everything from Alpona (ritual floor art) drawn by women and the embroidered borders of Kantha saris to artifacts made of clay, wood, stone, and metal, as well as the ornamentation of temples and edifices. In modern, educated urban society, alongside ritualistic and traditional Alpona, there is a prevailing custom of creating such designs in drawing rooms or on decorative items like flower vases purely for aesthetic appreciation. Contemporary artists also embody the spirit and form of Alpona as a vehicle of tradition, creating traditional motifs during occasions such as the Bengali New Year, Ekushey February (Language Martyrs' Day), Independence Day and Victory Day. The themes of Pat-gaan (songs accompanying scroll paintings) were religious in nature; through these performances as well as puppet shows and Bioscope presentations folk theatre emerged and evolved. Metal-based folk arts such as iron, bell-metal, brass and Dokra work also possess significant aesthetic value. Blacksmiths constituted a distinct social class in the then East Bengal. The practice of metalwork as a livelihood dates back to ancient India and artisans in various parts of Bengal continue to practice the Dokra craft to this day. Cottage industries producing essential items and utensils from cane, bamboo and clay have long been vital to Bengal's economy, serving human civilization throughout its stages of development. Mud houses can still be found in the remote regions of Bangladesh. Designs adorn various earthenware items such as cooking pots, pitchers and the decorative shokher hari (ornamental pots) embodying the hidden history of the Bengali people. It goes without saying that these crafts emerged out of the necessities of life and livelihood. In an agrarian society, bamboo was indispensable; items such as winnowing trays (kula), sieves, baskets, furniture, cool mats (shital pati), fences, hand fans and lids were essential for daily living. Crafting these items not only provided a livelihood but also represented an integral part of ancient Bengali folk art.⁸ Terracotta art created from fired clay has long been used to decorate temple walls, mausoleums and religious edifices. Since the dawn of civilization, toys, dolls, animal figurines and idols of deities have been crafted from terracotta. A notable form of ancient ceramic art is the shokher hari, traditionally used to carry delicacies like phirni, payesh (rice pudding) and pitha (traditional cakes) during festivals, religious ceremonies, weddings and social visits to relatives. Among the traditional needlecrafts of rural Bengal, nakshi kantha (embroidered quilts) and nakshi pakha (embroidered hand fans) stand out; these were frequently given as gifts during festivals and ceremonies. Rural women poured their creativity into nakshi kantha, stitching authentic portrayals of their joys and sorrows alongside images of flowers (such as kadam, sunflower, hibiscus, bakul, rose, shimul and pomegranate), wildlife (birds, elephants, horses, tigers and bears), and symbols like the moon, sun, fish, paddy and betel leaves. The Jamdani weaving tradition represents one of the finest creations of Bengali folk art. Meanwhile, the craft of creating wooden furniture and household utensils is known as daru-shilpa (woodcraft). Crafting furniture such as beds, chairs, tables and wardrobes from various woods like teak, jackfruit, and mahogany was both a livelihood and a testament to the artisans' exquisite craftsmanship. These artisans introduced diversity into the furniture by skillfully incorporating motifs, intricate designs, traditional alpana patterns and sculptural carvings. Wood artisans have met the demands of the past and continue to cater to contemporary needs. The cultural values of the Bengali people are also reflected in their culinary traditions; women in rural communities introduced the art of Nakshi Pitha (ornamental rice cakes) as an expression of aesthetic taste and elegance. Varieties include Dudh Chittoi, Bhapa, deep-fried, Patishapta and Pakan pithas, all of which were embellished with intricate patterns. These cakes were often decorated to resemble mango leaves, roses, fish, or various fruits and were served during festivals and occasions such as weddings, religious ceremonies, circumcisions, Nabanna (harvest festival), Shab-e-Barat, and Shab-e-Qadr.⁹

Humans use luxury or decorative items driven by a sense of aesthetics and a desire for refinement. The utility of everyday essentials differs from that of luxury goods; the former are items for survival, while the latter are objects of indulgence. Although the primary intent behind primitive folk art was not merely to create beauty

practical necessity being the foremost concern human society sought to create authentic beauty by infusing artistic sensibility into their work through intricate designs, skillful carving and the use of color.

Bhatiali Song Specifically associated with riverine life and boatmen; it reflects the lives of boatmen and those living along the riverbanks. Bhawaiya is a significant folk music genre of North Bengal; its primary themes include love, separation and the emotions of rural life. Jari Gaan developed around the events of Karbala and the memory of that tragedy. Sari Gaan is associated with group labor, particularly boat racing and river journeys. Gambhira Gaan is Popular especially in the Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj regions; it highlights social issues and contemporary topics through humor. Murshidi and Marfati Gaan both are associated with spiritual and Sufi philosophies. Pala Gaan is a narrative-based folk songs; featuring a blend of music, dialogue and performance. Kabi Gaan is a musical and argumentative exchange performed by two or more singers or poets. Folk dance and dance-oriented performances. Gambhira Dance is linked to the distinct cultural heritage of the Rajshahi region. Santhal Dance is an integral part of the festivals and social life of the indigenous communities in northern and north-western Bangladesh. Rakhine Dance used to performed during the festivals and cultural events of the Rakhine community. Lathi Khela is associated with traditional sports and dance-based displays. Jhumur Dance is particularly evident in the folk culture of the western and north-western regions.¹⁰

Wedding and Festival Dances used to practice in rural society during various social occasions, including weddings, the New Year and harvest festivals. Modernization, urbanization, mass media, globalization and digital technology are transforming the performance, audience and practical contexts of Bangladeshi folk music and dance. Modern musical instruments and technology are being utilized alongside traditional instruments and melodies. Consequently, while there is a risk of losing certain traditional practices on one hand, digital media has simultaneously created opportunities to preserve and present folk culture in new ways.

5. Intergenerational Transmission of Culture and Influence of Digital Technology

Modern education, urbanization, globalization, media, migration and digital technology are changing the folk beliefs and rituals of Bangladesh. Some traditions are disappearing or weakening, while others are being recreated in new forms. For example, folk festivals and traditional costumes are being reintroduced to the new generation through social media and cultural events.

For the young generation of Bangladesh in 2026, folk culture is on the one hand a symbol of tradition, identity and roots, on the other hand it is a cultural field newly adapted to modern life, globalization and digital technology. Recent research and reports suggest that the role of social media in the cultural practice of young people is very important; YouTube, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram are widely used among young people in Bangladesh.

Embracing modern culture here does not equate to rejecting tradition; rather, tradition is often being presented in new ways through modern technology. For instance, folk music, folk art and traditional attire are finding new audiences on social media. UNESCO has also highlighted the importance of social media-based awareness in reaching the youth to preserve Bangladesh's cultural heritage by 2026. Meanwhile, the influence of modernity on the daily cultural choices of young people is evident in Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram-based culture. K-pop, Western music and international entertainment. Modern fashion, Netflix/streaming-based entertainment, Fast food and changing dietary habits, Modern lifestyles and individualism, Digital communication and online social interaction.

Digital media has transformed the way young people engage with folk culture. The British Council's 'Next Generation Bangladesh' study identifies social media as a crucial element in shaping the lifestyles and culture of the youth, noting significant usage rates of platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram. Consequently, folk culture is no longer confined to villages, fairs, stages, or family settings; it is now reaching young people through digital videos, reels, streaming and online promotion. Bangladesh's Baul songs, Jamdani, Shitalpati, the Pahela Baishakh Mangal Shobhajatra, Dhaka's rickshaws and rickshaw art and the traditional Tangail sari are included in UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.¹¹

The traditional Tangail sari was added to the list in 2025. While traditional attire like sarees and panjabis remain part of their clothing choices, their current preferences also reflect Western styles, such as jeans, T-shirts, and Western fashion. Alongside traditional music such as Baul, Bhatiyali and folk songs the current young generation's list of preferences includes Pop, K-pop, Rap and Western music. An appreciation for Patachitra, Nakshi Kantha and handicrafts remains prevalent among the art- and culture-conscious younger generation; nevertheless, their primary interest today lies in digital art and graphic design. The younger generation's list of favorite foods includes pitha, bharta and traditional local dishes; additionally, their preferences extend to Western options such as fast food and international cuisine.

Social media both preserves folk culture in its original form and facilitates its transformation such as by incorporating modern instruments into folk songs, performing traditional songs with new melodies, or blending traditional attire with modern fashion. Through social media, Bangladesh's folk culture can reach international audiences, allowing local culture to enter the broader digital and global cultural sphere. It has become possible to digitally archive audio and video recordings of traditional songs, palagan (narrative folk performances), folktales, musical instruments, festivals and handicrafts. This ensures that many cultural elements on the verge of disappearing can be passed on to future generations. In modern Bangladesh, platforms like Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram have become vital channels for the preservation, promotion, reinvention and transformation of folk culture. Social media plays an increasingly significant role in familiarizing the younger generation with folk songs, folk dances, folktales, palligeeti (rural songs), Baul music, Jari-Sari and Bhatiyali songs, Nakshi Kantha (embroidered quilts) and other forms of folk art.

Intergenerational transmission of culture refers to the process by which a society's values, beliefs, language, rituals, folk knowledge, art, music, attire, dietary habits, ethics and ways of life from one generation to the next. Fables, proverbs, rhymes, riddles, folk songs and legends are transmitted orally between generations. At present, however, this intergenerational cultural transmission is not occurring in an unchanged manner; the cultural preferences and modes of participation among the youth are shifting under the influence of globalization, urbanization, modern education, mass media, social media and global culture.

6. Youth Participation and Community-Based Preservation

The role of the youth can be pivotal in the preservation of folk culture. It is possible to create digital archives, videos, audio recordings and written documents by gathering information on songs, stories, proverbs, folk customs and crafts from veteran folk artists, artisans, lyricists, storytellers, and bearers of culture. This mitigates the risk of losing culturally significant elements that are transmitted orally. Young people do not merely preserve folk culture in its static form; in many instances, they adapt it to align with modern tastes and technology.¹² Examples include incorporating modern musical instruments into folk songs, applying traditional motifs to contemporary clothing or transforming folktales into short films and digital content. Consequently, folk culture undergoes transformation and reinvention. Young people are leveraging social media and digital technology to introduce folk culture to new audiences. They perform folk songs with fresh musical arrangements, produce videos of folk dances, create content based on folktales and traditional cuisine, and promote the work of folk artists. In this way, the youth act as intermediaries for folk heritage. A video or post created by a young person particularly on digital platforms which can reach various regions of the country and the Bangladeshi diaspora in a very short time. As a result, the promotion of folk culture is no longer solely dependent on local festivals, fairs, or family gatherings. Therefore, authenticity, cultural context, and the participation of the relevant communities are crucial aspects of preservation.

There is a risk of losing folk culture if Folk songs, language, attire, or rituals are altered through distortion and exaggeration to attract larger audiences on social media. There is a danger that folk culture may be reduced to a mere source of entertainment or a commercial commodity, stripping it of its social and historical significance.¹³ The influence of foreign cultures may diminish the interest of the youth in local folk traditions and forms of entertainment. Regarding the crisis of authenticity, it can be difficult to distinguish between genuine artists, traditional forms and modern additions.

In the cultural reality of Bangladesh in 2026, a new type of cultural hybridization can be observed, along with direct conflict between traditional culture and global culture. Although the cultural tastes of young people have changed due to the influence of globalization, the Internet, social media, OTT platforms, international fashion and music, they are simultaneously using various elements of Bengali language, clothing, festivals, folk music and food culture in new ways. Incorporating modern cuts and designs into traditional items like sarees, Jamdani, handloom fabrics and Nakshi Kantha; The trend of pairing Panjabis and fatuas with jeans, sneakers, or modern accessories; New designs that blend indigenous motifs with international fashion trends have become a style statement for the younger generation.

Modern stages, digital promotion, photography, social media and contemporary attire have been incorporated into traditional events such as Pahela Baishakh, Nabanna and Poush Sankranti fairs. The Mangal Shobhajatra (procession of good wishes) held on Pahela Baishakh is a recognized form of living heritage in Bangladesh. Traditional foods are also entering new markets through modern recipes, packaging and online marketing. Recent discussions view digital platforms in a dual light: as an opportunity to bring 'living heritage' closer to the youth and simultaneously, as a potential risk contributing to the erosion of that heritage.¹⁴

Traditional professions are typically passed down through generations within families or via the guru-shishya (master-apprentice) system. However, a shortage of successors for these family trades is emerging as young people increasingly opt for careers in education, corporate jobs, business, industry, and the service sector. The rising use of plastic, steel, aluminum, synthetic fabrics and factory-made furniture has altered the demand for traditional goods such as earthenware, bamboo and cane products, hand-woven textiles and wooden items. This shift creates a risk of losing folk knowledge and skills handed down through generations and adversely affects a segment of the rural economy. Furthermore, the transfer of cultural knowledge from older generations to the youth may weaken. The decline of traditional folk professions in Bangladesh is primarily the cumulative result of modernization, industrialization, mechanization, changing market dynamics, shifts in the younger generation's career choices and shortages of raw materials and income. Yet, rather than viewing this solely as a process of total extinction, analyzing it as a "transformation and adaptation of traditional professions" offers a clearer understanding of the reality in contemporary Bangladesh. Examples such as Jamdani, Shitalpati, Tangail sarees and rickshaw art demonstrate that with access to proper markets, social recognition, institutional support and intergenerational knowledge transfer, traditional professions can survive and even thrive in new forms within modern society.¹⁵

Courses, research initiatives, fieldwork, cultural clubs and folk art workshops focused on folk culture could be introduced at both university and school levels. In particular, young people could be given opportunities to showcase folk heritage through platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, podcasts and digital storytelling. Bangladesh possesses an institutional framework for preservation activities through organizations like the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, the Bangladesh Folk Art and Crafts Foundation, the Bangla Academy, the Bangladesh National Museum and cultural institutions dedicated to ethnic minority communities. Updated data from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (as of 2026) also confirms the continued existence of these institutions and their relevant legal and policy frameworks. Interdisciplinary research involving fields such as folk culture, anthropology, history, fine arts, sociology and cultural studies at universities can facilitate the analysis of how local cultures evolve and adapt. Folk motifs, songs, designs, traditional attire and crafts can be integrated into modern fashion, graphic design, cinema, music, animation and game design. This approach ensures that heritage does not remain static but stays alive in new forms for the next generation. Cultural tourism initiatives could also be developed around historical landmarks and traditional cuisine.¹⁶

The UNESCO-Bangladesh dialogue on 18 September 2026 discussed the possibility of cooperation on intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, UNESCO nomination processes and a National Culture Strategy. That is, in 2026, Bangladesh's cultural heritage preservation activities are being more closely linked to international cooperation, policy formulation and UNESCO nomination.

An ongoing initiative by the UNESCO Dhaka Office and ICHCAP, spanning the 2026–2027 period, focuses on the Manipuri and other indigenous communities in Sylhet. A key objective of the project is to empower

young people to collect, document and promote their own cultural practices, stories and traditions. The project has a total budget of approximately US\$30,190 and is scheduled to run from January 1, 2026, to December 31, 2027.

A significant UNESCO-supported project currently underway in Bangladesh is titled "Implementing community-based heritage festivals in eight administrative divisions of Bangladesh." The project is being conducted in collaboration with the Bangladesh National Museum and ICH-pedia Bangladesh.

7. Conclusion

In Bangladesh, the cultural homogenization observed in 2026 cannot be viewed merely as a process of losing tradition; rather, it is the result of the interplay between globalization, digital technology, markets and local heritage. The crucial question is how to preserve Bangladesh's regional and folk cultural diversity while adapting to modernity. Young people can act as receivers, practitioners, documenters and re-presenters of folk culture. University students and young artists in particular can practice folk songs, folk dances and folk literature; interview and preserve information from elder cultural bearers; showcase folk traditions through digital archives, videos and social media; create new markets for folk arts and crafts; organize traditional festivals through university-based cultural organizations; document local languages, stories, proverbs and rituals. Community ownership and active participation of the younger generation are crucial for the sustainability of Bangladesh's folk culture. In the reality of 2026, if we can connect the youth with the elder cultural bearers using digital technology, it is possible to transfer the knowledge, skills, rituals, music, art and traditional lifestyle of folk culture to the new generation. Cultural globalization is a process through which the cultures, values, languages, dietary habits, attire, music, art, lifestyles and social behaviors of people across the globe become interconnected and mutually influential via international communication, mass media, technology, migration and trade. Its positive aspects include opportunities to promote folk music, folk art and handicrafts on an international scale, as well as the expansion of international cultural exchange. Conversely, challenges arising from this process include the declining practice of local traditions and customs, alongside rapid shifts in the lifestyles and cultural tastes of the younger generation. Cultural globalization presents a landscape of simultaneous challenges, transformations and new possibilities for the folk culture of Bangladesh. Therefore, factors such as preservation, youth participation, digital technology and the adaptation of local culture are of particular importance when analyzing contemporary folk culture.

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