



Intangible Cultural Heritage in Transition: Globalization and the Transformation of Gaye Holud in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Gaye Holud, one of the most recognizable pre-wedding rituals in Bangladesh, represents an important form of intangible cultural heritage that reflects collective memory, cultural identity, and intergenerational continuity. This study explores how gaye holud is transformed, negotiated, and culturally sustained within contemporary Bangladeshi society. Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, the research employed a qualitative ethnographic design using participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document review. Data were collected from 20 participants alongside observations of five gaye holud ceremonies across rural, urban, and diasporic contexts. The findings reveal that while traditional symbolic practices such as turmeric rituals, family blessings, and communal participation remain culturally significant, contemporary ceremonies increasingly incorporate luxury aesthetics, professional event management, cinematic photography, and digitally mediated performances shaped by social media culture. The study further demonstrates that authenticity within gaye holud is continuously negotiated rather than preserved in fixed form. Rather than indicating cultural decline, the ritual survives through adaptation, reinterpretation, and hybrid cultural expression. The study contributes to broader discussions on intangible cultural heritage, cultural sustainability, and mediated ritual performance while supporting the objectives of United Nations SDG 11.4 concerning the safeguarding and preservation of cultural heritage within rapidly changing societies.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage; gaye holud; cultural sustainability; globalization; ritual transformation; mediated heritage performance

INTRODUCTION

Intangible cultural heritage represents the living cultural practices through which communities preserve memory, identity, and social continuity across generations (Lenzerini, 2011). Rituals, ceremonies, oral traditions, and performative practices do more than reflect culture; they sustain shared meanings, strengthen social bonds, and connect individuals to collective histories within rapidly changing societies (Banda et al., 2024). In recent decades, however, globalization, urbanization, commercialization, and digital media have increasingly altered the ways traditional cultural practices are experienced and represented (Avcu & Koçoğlu, 2025). These changes have intensified international discussions surrounding the safeguarding and sustainability of living heritage, particularly within UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage framework and the broader objectives of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11.4, which emphasises the protection of cultural heritage as part of sustainable communities (UNESCO, 2020).

Within South Asian societies, wedding rituals remain important forms of intangible cultural heritage because they carry symbolic meanings, reinforce communal relationships, and facilitate intergenerational cultural transmission (Chakrabarti & Chakrabarti, 2025). In Bangladesh, gaye holud occupies a distinctive place within Bengali wedding culture as one of the most recognizable pre-wedding ceremonies (Hossain et al., 2025). Traditionally centered on the ceremonial application of turmeric paste to the bride and groom, the ritual symbolises blessings, prosperity, purification, and preparation for married life (Ahmad et al., 2025). Historically, gaye holud was largely organised within domestic and community-centered spaces where family participation, folk music, shared meals, symbolic dress practices, and oral traditions shaped the ceremonial atmosphere (Ibrahim, 2018). Beyond its ritual function, the ceremony has long served as a cultural expression through which Bengali families reproduce social values, emotional belonging, and collective memory.

Contemporary gaye holud practices, however, reveal substantial shifts in both aesthetic presentation and social meaning. Expanding consumer culture, urban lifestyles, transnational wedding trends, and the growth of the wedding industry have increasingly reshaped the ceremony, particularly within urban middle-class settings (Chopra, 2026). Many contemporary celebrations now incorporate designer fashion, luxury décor, professional event management, cinematic photography, choreographed performances, and visually curated settings influenced by global wedding cultures. Social media platforms have further transformed the ceremony

into a digitally circulated performance in which visual presentation and online visibility often become central to the ritual experience itself. As a result, gaye holud is no longer experienced solely as a family-centered cultural practice; it is increasingly shaped by mediated representation, aesthetic consumption, and public performance (Hossain et al., 2025).

Heritage scholars have long argued that cultural heritage should not be understood as a static inheritance preserved unchanged over time (Zhu, 2026). Instead, heritage emerges through ongoing social negotiation, reinterpretation, and cultural adaptation. Laurajane Smith conceptualises heritage as a cultural process through which communities construct identity, meaning, and belonging rather than simply preserving fixed historical traditions (Warren-Findley, 2007). Similarly, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains that heritage is continually produced and staged within changing social and historical contexts (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006). From a globalization perspective, Arjun Appadurai highlights how transnational cultural flows reshape local traditions and generate hybrid cultural forms that combine continuity with transformation (Patron & Sedon, 2026). These perspectives are particularly relevant to gaye holud, where traditional ritual elements increasingly coexist with commercial aesthetics, digital mediation, and globally influenced wedding imaginaries.

Existing scholarship on Bengali wedding rituals has primarily focused on symbolic practices, religious traditions, or broader discussions of modernization within South Asian wedding culture (Makal, 2024). Although several studies have examined changing wedding aesthetics and the commercialization of ritual practices, relatively limited attention has been given to gaye holud as an evolving form of intangible cultural heritage within contemporary Bangladesh (Neretina, 2025). More specifically, insufficient research has explored how globalization, commercialization, and digital media influence the cultural sustainability, authenticity, and community-centered meanings of gaye holud across rural, urban, and diasporic settings. Consequently, the transformation of ritual heritage within Bangladesh remains underexamined within critical heritage studies (Sen et al., 2006).

This study addresses that gap by examining how gaye holud is transformed, negotiated, and culturally sustained within contemporary Bangladeshi society. Drawing on an interpretivist qualitative approach and an ethnographic research design, the study investigates how ritual practices are preserved, adapted, and reinterpreted under conditions of globalization and modernity. Through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and heritage interpretation across rural, urban, and diasporic contexts, the research explores the changing

aesthetics, meanings, and cultural significance of gaye holud as a living heritage practice. In doing so, the study contributes to broader discussions surrounding intangible cultural heritage, cultural sustainability, mediated ritual performance, and heritage safeguarding within South Asian contexts.

- To explore the traditional cultural and symbolic foundations of gaye holud as a form of intangible cultural heritage in Bangladesh.
- To examine how globalization, commercialization, and digital media reshape the aesthetics, practices, and meanings of gaye holud across rural, urban, and diasporic contexts.
- To analyze how communities negotiate cultural continuity, authenticity, and cultural sustainability within contemporary gaye holud practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intangible cultural heritage and cultural sustainability

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) refers to the living cultural practices, rituals, knowledge systems, and social traditions that communities transmit across generations and continually reinterpret within changing social contexts (Salcedo, 2026). Unlike tangible heritage, which survives through physical preservation, intangible heritage is sustained through participation, performance, collective memory, and everyday cultural practice (Zabulis et al., 2025). Rituals, festive events, oral traditions, and communal ceremonies, therefore, play important roles in maintaining cultural identity and social continuity within communities (Banda et al., 2024).

Contemporary heritage scholarship increasingly approaches heritage as a dynamic cultural process rather than a fixed historical inheritance. Laurajane Smith argues that heritage is socially constructed through practices of identity formation, memory, and cultural negotiation, while Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett conceptualises heritage as a form of cultural production shaped by contemporary social conditions (Skrede & Hølleland, 2018). These perspectives suggest that living heritage survives through adaptation and reinterpretation rather than through rigid preservation.

Within globalization discourse, scholars have further observed that urbanization, commercialization, tourism, and digital media increasingly influence how cultural traditions are practiced, represented, and sustained (Güllü & Kiasif, 2025). As rituals become more

visible within mediated and consumer-oriented environments, concerns surrounding authenticity, continuity, and cultural sustainability have become central to heritage studies (Wu et al., 2022). These concerns closely align with the objectives of SDG 11.4, which emphasises safeguarding cultural heritage within sustainable communities.

Gaye holud as ritual heritage in Bangladesh

Wedding rituals across South Asia function as important expressions of intangible cultural heritage because they reinforce communal identity, family relationships, and intergenerational cultural transmission (Tambunan et al., 2026). In Bangladesh, gaye holud remains one of the most recognizable and culturally valued pre-wedding ceremonies practiced across both Hindu and Muslim communities (Khatun et al., 2025). Traditionally, the ceremony centers on the application of turmeric paste to the bride and groom as a symbolic gesture associated with blessings, purification, prosperity, and preparation for married life.

Historically, gaye holud was largely organised within domestic and community-centered spaces where family participation, folk music, symbolic dress practices, and shared meals shaped the ceremonial experience (Hossain et al., 2025). The ritual functioned not only as a wedding tradition but also as a collective cultural event through which social relationships and cultural memory were reinforced.

Existing scholarship highlights the hybrid cultural character of Bengali wedding rituals, where religious, regional, and social influences intersect within shared ceremonial practices. In recent years, urbanization, consumer culture, and the expansion of the wedding industry have significantly altered the structure and visual presentation of gaye holud (Boden, 2001). Many contemporary ceremonies increasingly incorporate luxury décor, designer fashion, staged performances, professional photography, and curated aesthetics influenced by global wedding trends (Mamari & Krishnamurthy, 2025). These changes illustrate how ritual heritage is being reshaped within contemporary social and economic environments.

Globalization, commercialization, and ritual transformation

Globalization has significantly influenced the transformation of ritual practices through transnational media, digital culture, and consumer-oriented aesthetics (Magar, 2026). Arjun Appadurai argues that global cultural flows contribute to the emergence of hybrid cultural forms produced through interactions between local traditions and global influences (De Zoysa & Appadurai, 1998). Within wedding culture, these processes increasingly reshape rituals into

visually staged performances connected to social visibility, aesthetic consumption, and mediated representation.

Digital media platforms have further intensified these transformations by altering how rituals are organised, experienced, and publicly circulated (Huang, 2025). Heritage scholars note that ceremonies are increasingly designed with visual presentation and digital circulation in mind, particularly within urban contexts (Vuolteenaho et al., 2015). Photography, cinematic videography, themed decoration, and online sharing have become central elements of many contemporary wedding rituals (Mäder, 2024).

In Bangladesh, these developments have strongly influenced gaye holud practices, especially within urban and diasporic communities. While such transformations may enhance cultural visibility and allow traditions to remain socially relevant among younger generations, they also raise concerns regarding commercialization, performative consumption, and the gradual weakening of communal intimacy and symbolic depth within ritual practices.

Authenticity and heritage negotiation

Authenticity remains one of the most debated concepts within heritage studies (Wood, 2020). Contemporary scholars increasingly challenge the idea that authenticity depends on preserving traditions in unchanged form. Instead, living heritage is often understood as something continuously negotiated through social interaction, cultural memory, and historical change (Thouki, 2024). Heritage evolves through ongoing processes of reinterpretation shaped by identity, modernity, and community experience (Harrison, 2012).

Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity explains how traditions adapt through encounters between local practices and global cultural influences (Umar & Lawan, 2024). From this perspective, transformation does not necessarily indicate cultural decline. Rather, it may reflect the ways communities selectively preserve symbolic meanings while adapting ritual forms to contemporary social realities.

The changing nature of gaye holud, therefore, reflects broader tensions between continuity and change within living heritage practices (Abbas, 2019). Although modernization, commercialization, and digital mediation have altered many aspects of the ceremony, communities continue to negotiate cultural meaning, emotional attachment, and ritual identity within evolving social contexts (Nwagbara, 2025).

Despite growing scholarship on intangible cultural heritage, limited research has critically examined gaye holud as a dynamic form of living heritage shaped by globalization, commercialization, and mediated cultural performance across rural, urban, and diasporic settings. This study addresses that gap by exploring how gaye holud is transformed and culturally sustained within contemporary Bangladeshi society.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in intangible cultural heritage (ICH) discourse, cultural hybridity theory, and globalization perspectives to examine the transformation of gaye holud within contemporary Bangladeshi society. The concept of ICH provides the central theoretical foundation of the study by emphasizing heritage as a living cultural practice sustained through participation, transmission, and community experience (Eichler, 2020). From this perspective, gaye holud is understood not as a static tradition, but as a ritual continually reshaped through social interaction and cultural adaptation.

The study further draws on Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity to explain how traditional ritual practices interact with global wedding aesthetics, digital media culture, and modern social expectations (Bhabha, 2012). Contemporary gaye holud ceremonies increasingly combine traditional symbolic elements with mediated performances, luxury aesthetics, and transnational influences, creating hybrid forms of cultural expression (Rajanala & Vashi, 2018).

In addition, Arjun Appadurai's globalization perspective helps explain how global cultural flows, consumer culture, and digital visibility influence local ritual practices (De Zoysa & Appadurai, 1998). Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a framework for understanding how gaye holud is negotiated, transformed, and culturally sustained within changing social and cultural environments.

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigms and Approach

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm to explore the cultural meanings, symbolic practices, and social transformations associated with gaye holud as a form of intangible cultural heritage in Bangladesh. Interpretivism was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand how individuals and communities interpret, negotiate, and sustain ritual heritage

within changing social and cultural contexts (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). A qualitative research approach was employed to capture participants' lived experiences, cultural perspectives, and interpretations regarding the transformation of gaye holud under globalization and modernity.

Research Design

The study employed an ethnographic research design to examine gaye holud as a living cultural practice embedded within community life and social interaction. Ethnography was appropriate because the research focused on ritual performance, symbolic meanings, cultural continuity, and community participation across different social settings (Wilson, 1977). The design enabled an in-depth exploration of how traditional practices are preserved, modified, and negotiated within rural, urban, and diasporic contexts.

Study sites and participants

The research was conducted across selected rural and urban regions of Bangladesh, alongside observations and interview narratives from members of the Bangladeshi diaspora. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who possessed direct experience and cultural knowledge regarding gaye holud practices (Campbell et al., 2020). The participants included married couples, family members, cultural practitioners, wedding organisers, and individuals actively involved in organizing or participating in gaye holud ceremonies. In total, 20 participants were included in the study, and five gaye holud ceremonies were observed.

Data collection methods

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document review. Semi-structured interviews enabled participants to describe their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding the changing aesthetics, symbolic meanings, and cultural significance of gaye holud (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Participant observation allowed the researcher to document ritual performances, dress practices, music, decorations, community participation, and ceremonial interactions within natural settings. In addition, relevant cultural documents, media representations, photographs, and existing literature were reviewed to contextualise the transformation of gaye holud within broader heritage and globalization discourse.

Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis with heritage interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interview transcripts, observational notes, and documentary materials were systematically coded to identify recurring themes related to heritage continuity, commercialization, ritual transformation, authenticity, and cultural sustainability. The analysis was guided by intangible cultural heritage discourse and globalization perspectives to interpret how gaye holud is negotiated and culturally sustained within contemporary Bangladeshi society.

Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed methodological triangulation through the use of multiple data sources and methods, including interviews, observations, and document review. Thick description and continuous comparison of findings across contexts further enhanced interpretive credibility. Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study by ensuring informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity during data collection and interpretation. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and pseudonyms were used where necessary to protect participant identity.

Table 1: *Methodological matrix*

Methodological Component	Description
Participants	Married couples Family members Cultural practitioners Wedding organisers Individuals involved in gaye holud ceremonies
Sampling technique	Purposive Sampling
Sample size	20 participants 5 observed gaye holud ceremonies
Data collection methods	Semi-structured Interviews Participant Observation Document Review
Data analysis technique	Thematic Analysis with Heritage Interpretation

Source: Authors' compilation

Table 2: *Participant coding structure*

Participant Category	Codes	Number
Married couples	MC1 – MC4	4
Family members	FM1 – FM5	5
Cultural practitioners	CP1 – CP3	3
Wedding organisers	WO1 – WO3	3
Gaye holud participants	GP1 – GP5	5

Total**20****Source:** Authors' compilation**Table 3:** *Observed ceremony coding structure*

Observed Ceremony	Code
Observed gaye holud ceremony 1	OHC1
Observed gaye holud ceremony 2	OHC2
Observed gaye holud ceremony 3	OHC3
Observed gaye holud ceremony 4	OHC4
Observed gaye holud ceremony 5	OHC5

Source: Authors' compilation

FINDINGS

Observational Findings from Gaye Holud Ceremonies

Ritual symbolism and traditional practices

Across all five observed ceremonies, gaye holud remained deeply rooted in symbolic and emotional traditions despite noticeable changes in presentation and organization. The ritual application of turmeric continued to hold strong cultural meaning, particularly as a gesture associated with blessings, purity, prosperity, and the transition into married life (OHC1–OHC5). In every ceremony, family elders played visible roles in guiding ritual activities, offering blessings, and maintaining ceremonial continuity.

The rural ceremonies, especially OHC1 and OHC3, reflected a stronger sense of communal intimacy. Family members gathered in informal home settings where traditional songs, collective participation, and shared food preparation created a warm and emotionally connected environment. Decorations were relatively simple and often handmade, while traditional yellow and orange attire remained dominant throughout the events. These ceremonies appeared less concerned with visual perfection and more focused on preserving emotional and cultural togetherness.

Urban ceremonies, however, presented a different atmosphere. While the core ritual practices remained intact, they were performed within more organised and aesthetically curated environments. Even so, turmeric rituals, blessings from elders, and collective participation continued to anchor the ceremonies culturally. This suggests that although the outward appearance of gaye holud is changing, its symbolic foundation still carries considerable importance within Bengali social life.

Commercialised aesthetics and wedding spectacle

One of the most noticeable transformations observed during the ceremonies was the growing influence of commercialization and luxury-oriented wedding culture. Urban ceremonies, particularly OHC2 and OHC4, featured elaborate floral installations, professional lighting arrangements, coordinated dress themes, and highly curated stage designs. In several cases, the ceremony space resembled a professionally managed entertainment event rather than a traditionally intimate family gathering.

Professional event organisers, photographers, makeup artists, and choreographers were actively involved throughout these ceremonies. Considerable attention was given to visual presentation, including stage entrances, synchronised performances, and cinematic photography sessions. In some instances, ceremonial activities were paused or adjusted to accommodate photography and video production requirements.

These observations indicate that gaye holud is increasingly shaped by consumer culture and social visibility. The ritual no longer functions solely as a family-centered tradition but also as a public performance connected to class identity, aesthetic display, and social prestige. At the same time, traditional symbolic practices continued to coexist alongside these modern additions, reflecting a complex blending of heritage and spectacle.

Digital media and the visual performance of heritage

Digital media played a highly visible role across the observed ceremonies. OHC2, OHC4, and OHC5 particularly demonstrated how social media culture now influences the structure, timing, and visual organization of gaye holud events. Professional videography teams, drone cameras, staged photo sessions, and live online sharing were integrated into the ceremonies from beginning to end.

Several ritual moments appeared carefully arranged for visual capture rather than spontaneous participation. Participants frequently paused for photographs, repeated ceremonial actions for better video coverage, and gathered around specially designed photo areas decorated with floral backdrops and lighting installations. These practices suggest that contemporary gaye holud ceremonies are increasingly performed with digital audiences in mind.

At the same time, digital platforms also appeared to strengthen cultural connections across geographical boundaries. In OHC5, online participation enabled relatives living abroad

to engage virtually in ceremonial activities. This demonstrates that digital media simultaneously support cultural continuity and transform how heritage is experienced, performed, and circulated. Rather than simply documenting rituals, digital technologies are actively reshaping the ritual experience itself.

Hybrid ritual forms and cultural adaptation

The observed ceremonies consistently reflected a blending of traditional Bengali ritual practices with global wedding aesthetics. Traditional turmeric rituals, blessings from elders, folk elements, and communal gatherings were often combined with cinematic music, designer fashion, luxury decorations, and choreographed performances (OHC2; OHC4; OHC5). This created hybrid ceremonial forms that balanced cultural continuity with modern social expectations.

Urban ceremonies demonstrated stronger incorporation of international wedding trends, particularly through visual styling, coordinated aesthetics, and curated storytelling through photography and video. Yet even within these highly modernised settings, participants continued to treat gaye holud as an important expression of Bengali cultural identity.

Rather than replacing traditional practices entirely, modern influences appeared to be selectively integrated into existing ritual structures. The ceremonies, therefore, reflected an ongoing process of cultural negotiation in which communities adapt heritage practices while preserving symbolic meaning and emotional attachment. These observations suggest that gaye holud survives not through rigid preservation but through flexible adaptation within contemporary social life.

Participant perspectives on ritual heritage and transformation

Gaye holud as cultural identity and living heritage

Participants consistently described gaye holud as an important part of Bengali cultural identity rather than simply a pre-wedding celebration. Many viewed the ceremony as a meaningful tradition that connects generations through shared rituals, emotions, and family participation. As one family member explained, “*Gaye holud is part of our family identity. Even if many things change, this ritual keeps our traditions alive*” (FM2). A married participant similarly noted, “*The ceremony carries emotional and cultural meanings that we inherited from our parents and grandparents*” (MC1).

Participants from rural backgrounds especially emphasised the importance of collective participation, traditional songs, and home-centered arrangements in maintaining the cultural authenticity of the ceremony. According to one cultural practitioner, *“Earlier ceremonies were simple, but they felt emotionally connected to family and community traditions”* (CP1).

These narratives reveal that participants continue to associate gaye holud with cultural continuity, collective memory, and emotional belonging. Even among younger generations, the ritual remains an important symbol of Bengali identity despite ongoing social and aesthetic transformation.

Commercialization and ritual transformation

Most participants acknowledged that contemporary gaye holud ceremonies have changed significantly due to commercialization and the expansion of the wedding industry. Wedding organisers and younger participants particularly highlighted the growing emphasis on decoration, visual presentation, and professional event management. One organiser explained, *“Families now want ceremonies that look unique and visually impressive because weddings have become social status events”* (WO2).

Several participants expressed concern that modern ceremonies increasingly prioritise appearance over communal interaction and symbolic meaning. A family member commented, *“People now spend more on stage decoration and photography than on the cultural aspects of the ritual”* (FM4). Others, however, viewed these changes more positively, suggesting that modern aesthetics help keep traditions attractive and relevant to younger generations.

These responses illustrate the tension between heritage preservation and commercial spectacle. While commercialization has enhanced the visibility and scale of gaye holud ceremonies, it has also altered how participants experience and interpret the ritual itself.

Digital media and mediated heritage

Participants repeatedly described social media as one of the strongest influences shaping contemporary gaye holud practices. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube were frequently mentioned as sources of inspiration for decoration styles, photography trends, and ceremonial organization. One participant explained, *“Everything is now organised with social media in mind because people want beautiful pictures and online appreciation”* (GP3).

Wedding organisers further emphasised the increasing importance of visual documentation within ceremonies. As one organiser stated, *“Photography and videography have become central because families want cinematic memories to share online”* (WO1).

At the same time, participants recognised both positive and negative effects of digital visibility. Some believed that social media helps younger generations and diaspora communities remain connected to Bengali traditions. Others felt that excessive focus on online presentation sometimes weakens the emotional and communal aspects of the ritual. One cultural practitioner observed, *“Sometimes the ceremony feels more like a photoshoot than a family ritual”* (CP2).

These findings demonstrate that digital media now function as both a tool of cultural preservation and a force reshaping the performance of ritual heritage.

Authenticity, adaptation, and cultural sustainability

Questions surrounding authenticity and cultural sustainability appeared throughout participant narratives. Many participants believed that traditions naturally evolve over time and that adaptation is necessary for cultural continuity. As one married participant explained, *“Tradition cannot remain exactly the same forever, but the cultural meaning should stay”* (MC3). Another participant added, *“Modern decoration is acceptable if the core ritual values and family involvement remain intact”* (GP1).

Older participants, however, were more likely to express concern about the growing influence of commercialization and visual spectacle. One family member remarked, *“Now many ceremonies focus more on appearance than emotional or cultural connection”* (FM5). Younger participants, in contrast, often viewed hybrid ceremonial practices as a normal and creative part of cultural evolution.

Overall, participants emphasised that preserving the symbolic and emotional essence of gaye holud matters more than maintaining rigid traditional forms. These perspectives suggest that authenticity within contemporary gaye holud is continuously negotiated rather than fixed. The ritual remains culturally meaningful because communities continue to reinterpret and adapt it within changing social realities shaped by globalization and modernity.

DISCUSSION

Heritage Transformation into a Globalised Context

The findings reveal that gaye holud is being continuously reshaped by globalization, commercialization, and changing social lifestyles. Despite these transformations, the ritual continues to retain its symbolic and cultural significance within Bengali society. Traditional practices such as turmeric application, family blessings, and communal participation remained visible across both rural and urban ceremonies, suggesting that heritage continuity is maintained even within changing ceremonial forms.

These findings support Laurajane Smith's view of heritage as a dynamic cultural process rather than a fixed tradition. Similarly, Arjun Appadurai's concept of global cultural flows helps explain how local ritual practices increasingly incorporate global wedding aesthetics, producing hybrid forms of cultural expression that combine tradition with modernity.

Commercialization and Mediated Ritual Performance

The study further demonstrates that contemporary gaye holud ceremonies are increasingly shaped by consumer culture and digital visibility. Luxury décor, cinematic photography, choreographed performances, and professional event management have transformed many ceremonies into visually staged social events. In several cases, ritual performances appeared strongly influenced by social media presentation and online circulation.

Participant narratives reflect broader processes of heritage commodification in which cultural practices become linked to spectacle, aesthetic consumption, and social prestige. At the same time, participants expressed mixed responses toward these transformations. While some viewed commercialization as weakening communal intimacy and symbolic meaning, others considered modern presentation necessary for maintaining cultural relevance among younger generations.

Digital media also emerged as a significant force shaping contemporary ritual heritage. Social media platforms not only influence ceremonial aesthetics but also expand the visibility of Bengali traditions across diasporic communities. The findings therefore suggest that digital technologies simultaneously contribute to heritage preservation, transformation, and commercialization.

Authenticity, Adaptation, and Cultural Sustainability

The study highlights that authenticity within gaye holud is continuously negotiated rather than fixed. Many participants emphasised that traditions naturally evolve and that preserving symbolic meaning is more important than maintaining unchanged ceremonial forms. These perspectives align with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity, which explains how traditions adapt through interactions between local and global influences.

Rather than indicating cultural decline, the transformation of gaye holud reflects an adaptive process through which communities sustain ritual heritage within contemporary social realities. The findings, therefore, suggest that cultural sustainability depends on the ability of communities to reinterpret and preserve meaningful symbolic practices across generations. In this regard, the study contributes to broader discussions on intangible cultural heritage safeguarding and the objectives of United Nations SDG 11.4, which emphasises the protection and sustainability of cultural heritage within rapidly changing societies.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to intangible cultural heritage scholarship by demonstrating how gaye holud functions as a dynamic and adaptive form of living heritage within contemporary Bangladeshi society. By integrating heritage discourse, cultural hybridity, and globalization perspectives, the study extends existing discussions on how ritual traditions negotiate continuity, authenticity, and transformation under modern social conditions. The findings further contribute to heritage studies by showing that cultural sustainability depends not on rigid preservation, but on the ability of communities to reinterpret symbolic practices across changing contexts.

Practical Implications

The study highlights the importance of community-centered approaches to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. The findings suggest that preserving gaye holud requires greater emphasis on intergenerational cultural transmission, documentation of ritual practices, and culturally sensitive heritage initiatives. The study may also inform policymakers, cultural organizations, and heritage practitioners working on cultural sustainability and heritage preservation in line with United Nations SDG 11.4.

CONCLUSION

Gaye holud continues to remain an important expression of Bengali cultural identity and intangible cultural heritage despite significant social and cultural transformations. The study demonstrates that globalization, commercialization, digital media, and consumer culture have substantially reshaped the aesthetics, organization, and public representation of the ritual, particularly within urban and diasporic contexts. Contemporary ceremonies increasingly incorporate luxury aesthetics, mediated performances, and global wedding influences while still preserving core symbolic practices such as turmeric rituals, family blessings, and communal participation.

The findings further reveal that the transformation of gaye holud does not necessarily indicate the decline of tradition. Instead, the ritual survives through continuous processes of adaptation, negotiation, and reinterpretation within changing social realities. Communities selectively integrate modern influences while maintaining emotional, symbolic, and cultural connections to heritage. Authenticity, therefore, emerges as a dynamic and negotiated process rather than a fixed cultural condition.

Overall, the study argues that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage requires flexible and community-centered approaches that recognise adaptation as an essential component of cultural sustainability. The transformation of gaye holud reflects how living heritage practices continue to evolve while preserving their cultural significance within contemporary Bangladeshi society.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted using a relatively small qualitative sample consisting of 20 participants and observations from five gaye holud ceremonies, which limits the broader generalization of the findings. Second, the study focused mainly on selected rural, urban, and diasporic contexts and may not fully capture the regional and socioeconomic diversity of gaye holud practices across Bangladesh.

In addition, the study primarily examined heritage transformation, commercialization, and digital mediation. Other dimensions such as gender dynamics, religious interpretations, and class-based cultural differences were not explored extensively. Future research may address these areas to develop a broader understanding of ritual transformation and intangible cultural heritage within South Asian societies.

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