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## Symbolism and Cultural Pluralism in Bangladeshi Folk Art: Imaginaries and Expressions of Nationhood

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Bangladeshi folk art contributes to the construction of national identity and reflects the nation's cultural pluralism. While folk art has been extensively studied for its aesthetic and symbolic elements, its role in negotiating religious and ethnic diversity within the context of nationhood remains underexplored. This research fills the gap by analyzing a range of folk-art forms, including Patachitra scroll paintings, Nakshi Kantha embroidery, and rickshaw paintings, and their engagement with pluralistic national narratives. Through ethnographic fieldwork, semiotic analysis, and interviews with artists, the study examines how these art forms mediate interfaith dialogue, gendered cultural preservation, and the negotiation of urban-rural identities. The findings reveal that folk art, far from being a static tradition, is a dynamic and evolving practice that adapts to social, political, and cultural shifts in contemporary Bangladesh. Key results indicate that these art forms actively promote social cohesion and of a unified national identity by celebrating cultural diversity. This paper contributes to the growing field of cultural studies by demonstrating that folk art is not only a cultural artifact but also a vital tool in negotiating Bangladesh's pluralistic identity, offering new insights into the intersection of art, culture, and nationhood.

### INTRODUCTION

Bangladeshi folk art is more than just an aesthetic tradition; it is a vital cultural expression deeply rooted in the identity, beliefs, and historical experiences of the people. The folk art of Bangladesh spans both rural and urban domains, encompassing a rich variety of forms such as Patachitra (scroll paintings), Nakshi Kantha (embroidered quilts), Alpana (floor art), Jatra (folk theatre), Jamdani textiles, pottery, Baul songs, indigenous folk paintings, and Rickshaw painting as an urban folk tradition. Each of these art forms carries distinct mediums, motifs, and cultural contexts, yet together they contribute to a vibrant, evolving "cultural tapestry" (Ahmed, 2019; Rahman, 2018).

While folk art has traditionally been explored for its aesthetic qualities and symbolic meanings, its role in navigating the complexities of religious and ethnic diversity within the context of national identity has been underexplored. This paper addresses a significant gap in the literature by investigating how folk-art functions as a dynamic agent in mediating pluralism within Bangladesh's national framework. Specifically, this study focuses on the symbolism embedded in folk art, exploring how motifs and colors serve as vehicles for cultural narratives, and how these visual languages reflect the diverse, multi-religious nature of Bangladeshi society.

The symbolism found in these folk arts is not merely decorative; it encodes deeper meanings rooted in nature, religion, indigenous traditions, and socio-political history. For instance, traditional Bengali folk art employs colors and patterns that are rich in meaning: red symbolizes power and auspiciousness, white represents purity and

peace, and green signifies fertility and new life (Karukarjo, 2025). Motifs drawn from mythology, religious narratives, and rural life provide a framework for understanding the cultural memory and values passed down through generations, serving as tools for intergenerational transmission (Chowdhury, 2021).

One key point emphasized in this paper is the role of folk art as a living cultural tradition. It is not static or merely historical; instead, it evolves in response to changes in social, political, and cultural dynamics, continuing to engage with the community's daily life. This dynamic, "living heritage" is a means of articulating shared values, histories, and communal identities. Particularly in a multicultural and multi-religious society like Bangladesh, where Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and indigenous influences intersect, folk art serves as an essential medium for expressing religious and ethnic pluralism (Chowdhury, 2021). This is especially significant in the context of Bangladesh's complex history, where cultural pluralism has been both a source of social cohesion and, at times, a point of contention.

The connection between symbolism and pluralism in folk art becomes especially evident in works like Patachitra and Rickshaw painting, where religious symbols and motifs from diverse backgrounds coexist. These art forms embody an ethos of cultural pluralism that is central to the notion of Bangladeshi nationhood. For instance, Patachitra scrolls often depict Hindu deities alongside Islamic motifs, creating a visual language of coexistence and shared cultural heritage (Khan, 2022). Rickshaw painting, a modern urban folk art, exemplifies how traditional rural motifs merge with contemporary urban

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themes, capturing the hybridity of identity within rapidly urbanizing and globalizing Bangladesh. These artworks serve as expressions of both tradition and modernity, illustrating the ongoing process of nation-building in a complex, plural society.

Folk art also plays a significant social role. It constructs national narratives surrounding interfaith relations, gendered labor, and community memory. For example, Nakshi Kantha, primarily crafted by women, represents both a form of artistic expression and a means of gendered cultural preservation, where women's roles in maintaining cultural practices are both celebrated and sustained (Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation, 2025). These artistic practices are closely tied to festivals, religious ceremonies, and community gatherings, reinforcing relational structures that transcend sectarian divides and foster a sense of social solidarity.

Beyond its aesthetic appeal, folk art offers an invaluable lens through which to explore the genesis of nationhood in Bangladesh. The country's turbulent history under colonial rule and its evolving urban-rural identities present challenges to the formation of a unified national identity. Folk art, however, continues to be a means of bridging these divides, weaving together indigenous traditions with modern, urbanizing forces. The interplay between these traditions provides a rich foundation for understanding how cultural practices have shaped and continue to shape the nation's collective identity. This dynamic process underscores the role of folk art not just as a passive artifact, but as an active participant in the ongoing negotiation of national identity.

This paper aims to explore three interrelated dimensions

- Symbolism in Folk Art: Understanding how the colors, motifs, and themes in folk art reflect nature, society, religion, and cosmology, and how these elements contribute to the formation of national identity.
- Cultural Pluralism: Investigating how various folk art forms mediate religious, ethnic, and social diversity, emphasizing the coexistence and hybridity that are central to the notion of Bangladeshi nationhood.
- Nationhood and Identity Formation: Analyzing the role of folk art in constructing collective imaginaries of Bangladesh, especially as it navigates the intersection of rural traditions and urban modernity.

The framing of this research is based on the premise that Bangladeshi folk art is not a fixed, monolithic entity, but a plural and evolving category that functions as a means of articulating both indigenous and rural traditions within modern urbanizing dynamics (as exemplified by Rickshaw painting). The study offers insights into how folk art serves as a medium for expressing cultural pluralism and shaping the evolving narrative of nationhood in Bangladesh in the twenty-first century.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Bangladesh's folk art has attracted increasing scholarly attention as a vital repository of the nation's cultural heritage, identity, and social fabric. Extensive research

has established that folk art in Bangladesh is deeply intertwined with the lived experiences, religious traditions, and ecological settings of its predominantly rural and increasingly urban populations (Hasan, 1983; Rahman, 2018). Scholars emphasize that folk art including diverse forms such as Patachitra painting, Nakshi Kantha embroidery, Alpana floor art, Jatra folk theatre, Baul music, and the more recent urban Rickshaw painting serves as a visual and performative site where cultural pluralism and collective identities are enacted and negotiated (Ahmed, 2019; Khan, 2022).

The foundational work by Hasan (1983) conceptualizes folk art as a communal practice shaped by cumulative originality rather than individual creativity, underscoring its role as a collective cultural expression. This understanding situates folk art as an evolving tradition, closely connected to oral folklore, including rhymes, proverbs, and folktales, which collectively form the intangible cultural heritage of Bangladesh (Ijtema *et al.*, 2023). This body of work highlights the dynamic and living nature of folk art, reflecting ongoing dialogues between tradition and modernity.

Recent ethno-graphic and art historical studies have highlighted the plurality of Bangladeshi folk art. Chowdhury (2021) and Ahmed (2019) emphasize the role folk art plays as a cultural meeting point with Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and indigenous stories at its heart, in line with the country's religious and ethnic diversity. This is symbolic and is to be performed in the public and ritual fields, but also during parties, communal gatherings, corporeal practices, and standard practices. Certain gendered aspects are also preserved through cultural art forms, such as Alpana and Nakshi Kantha, where women themselves act as gatekeepers, safeguarding folk art forms and sentiments (Ahmed, 2019).

Urban folk art forms, such as rickshaw painting, have been relatively understudied in academic writings over the last two decades and reflect contemporary cultural syncretism (Khan, 2022). Abstract: These gaudy, lurid collections of rustic lore and shopping catalogs, sacred visions and social snipes have a great deal to say about the making of identity in times of violently accelerating change under rapid urbanization and globalization. This emerging discourse locates the Rickshaw painting as not merely a work of art, but as a critique and a mode of expression through which urban identity, political subjectivity, and social ecology are further projected (Khan, 2022).

Folk art traditions have also been passed down in a continuous line from prehistoric and early historic times, as revealed by archaeological findings and historical studies, suggesting a much older heritage. The excavations at Mahasthangarh and Wari-Bateshwar have found cultural antecedents that directly reflect the contemporary craft culture (pottery, textiles, or others), thus linking folk arts with ancient human settlement and rituals (2020). This historicity also raises questions about readings of the folk art as a tradition that is both living and grounded in particular localities and social relations.

A second key theme in the literature is this process of preservation and transformation. The folk arts continue, as always, to bear the traditional shapes and community values, but are also shaped by new patterns of social, economic, and technological order (Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation, 2025). Mass media, urbanization, and the market process have led to the commodification of folk music, crafts, and visual arts, generating discussions about sustainability, authenticity, and innovation in ethnographic traditions (Hassan 1983; Ijtima *et al.*

In addition, folk art has been explored as an exceptionally robust space of the imagining and articulation of nationhood. Studies have highlighted that folk arts serve as a visual and symbolic lingua franca, enabling the construction of group identity, ethnic solidarity, and national pride in a multicultural and pluralistic nation such as Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2021; Rahman & Islam, 2017). Very much alive is the hybridity of symbols and stories, which various collective experiences owe to folk art, suggesting that reconciliation under unity is a work in progress one among many check-list items for nationalist postcolonial Bangladesh Ahmed (2019).

In the final analysis, what becomes apparent is that Bangladeshi folk art emerges as a complex practice that intersects at different levels to produce aesthetics, cultural memory, religious pluralism, and commentary on society and identity. Rednaxela “You Must Have It So Good After All These Things I’ve Done For You,” from previous years of neglect and doubt. Instead, it’s not so much a living tradition as the absence of one. In this respect, folk art offers a powerful means of understanding how pluralist nationalisms in Bangladesh are played out and contested, whether in villages or cities.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the role of Bangladeshi folk art in expressing cultural pluralism and shaping national identity. Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for examining the symbolic, performative, and material dimensions of folk art, enabling an in-depth understanding of its cultural significance and social functions. The study employs ethnographic fieldwork, semiotic analysis, and semi-structured interviews to investigate the socio-cultural narratives embedded in folk art forms such as Patachitra, Nakshi Kantha, and Rickshaw painting.

### Research Design and Approach

The study is grounded in ethnographic and interpretive methods, with a focus on iconographic analysis, field participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with individuals directly involved in the creation and interpretation of folk art. Ethnography enables immersion in the cultural contexts where these art forms are created and experienced, fostering a deep understanding of the meanings and practices associated with them. The interpretive nature of the study draws on cultural studies approaches, which emphasize the lived

experiences, identity, and power relations surrounding folk art practices (Pickering, 2020). This approach seeks to decode not only the visual elements of the art forms but also the social, religious, and historical contexts in which they are situated.

### Iconographic and Visual Analysis

The study incorporates iconographic analysis to examine the motifs, colors, and imagery present in the selected folk-art forms. A systematic analysis of these symbolic elements allows for the identification of their cultural, religious, and historical meanings. For example, Patachitra paintings are analyzed for the way they incorporate symbols from Hindu mythology alongside Islamic motifs. In contrast, rickshaw paintings are examined for their fusion of traditional rural imagery and contemporary urban influences. The goal is to decode how these visual elements reflect cultural pluralism and contribute to national identity.

### Ethnographic Fieldwork and Participant Observation

Fieldwork is conducted in both rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. Specifically, visits are made to Kushtia (known for Patachitra scrolls) and Dhaka (a hub for Rickshaw painting). Fieldwork involves participant observation, where the researcher actively engages with artisans and communities to document the creative processes, community involvement, and contextual use of the folk-art forms. This immersive approach enables the researcher to observe how these art forms are integrated into the everyday lives of individuals and how they contribute to the construction of cultural narratives. The researcher spends approximately three months in rural areas and three months in urban areas to capture the diverse practices and their roles in different social contexts.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews are conducted with folk artists, artisans, Rickshaw painters, cultural practitioners, and community members. The interview protocol is designed to explore the following areas:

- The symbolism embedded in folk art and its role in expressing cultural pluralism.
- How folk art practices contribute to the construction of national identity and interfaith dialogue.
- The evolution of folk art traditions in response to urbanization, globalization, and socio-political changes.
- The personal and collective meanings attributed to specific motifs and art forms.

Interviews are conducted using open-ended questions, allowing participants to narrate their experiences and interpretations of folk art in their own words. The interviews are audio-recorded with the participants’ consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to the study’s key themes.

### Focus Groups and Informal Discussions

In addition to interviews, focus groups, and informal discussions are held with both practitioners and audiences of folk art. These group dialogues explore shared meanings, contested interpretations, and the role of folk art in fostering a sense of community and national unity. Focus groups offer participants the opportunity to collectively discuss and debate the cultural significance of folk art, enriching the study with diverse viewpoints and deeper insights.

### Sampling Strategy

The study employs a purposive sampling strategy to select participants who have direct experience with the folk-art forms under investigation. The sample includes:

- Master artisans who create traditional folk art (e.g., Patachitra, Nakshi Kantha).
- Rickshaw painters represent a modern urban folk art tradition.
- Cultural historians and ethnographers can provide historical and cultural context.
- Community elders who play a role in preserving and transmitting folk art traditions.

This purposive sampling method ensures that participants have deep knowledge and personal experience with the cultural practices, providing rich and relevant data for the study.

### Data Analysis

Data collected from interviews, field notes, and visual analysis are analyzed using thematic coding and narrative analysis. The first step involves open coding, where initial codes are generated from interview transcripts and field observations. These codes are then organized into broader themes, such as symbolism, pluralism, and national identity. The next step, axial coding, identifies relationships between the themes and refines the analysis to uncover the underlying narratives connecting these themes. Finally, selective coding is used to distill the core findings and connect them back to the research questions. Visual data (such as photographs of folk art forms) are analyzed using iconographic analysis, focusing on motifs, colors, and patterns that carry cultural significance. This visual data is integrated with the thematic analysis to provide a holistic understanding of how folk art mediates cultural pluralism.

### Ensuring Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability, several strategies are employed:

- Triangulation: Data are collected from multiple sources, including interviews, field observations, and visual analysis, to cross-verify findings and ensure consistency.
- Member Checking: After interviews, participants are invited to review the transcripts and the interpretations of their responses to ensure accuracy.
- Peer Review: Colleagues and experts in cultural studies,

anthropology, and art history review the methodology and findings to minimize biases and strengthen the research.

- Reflexivity: The researcher maintains a reflexive stance throughout the study, being aware of their own background and how it may influence the research process.

### Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and interests. This includes obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring anonymity where requested, and respecting cultural sensitivities. The collaborative nature of ethnographic research is recognized, with participants being seen as co-producers of knowledge. The researcher's role is to facilitate the research process while ensuring that participants have agency in shaping the narratives that emerge from the study (Mohajan, 2018).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings organized into key themes: symbolism in folk art, cultural pluralism, and nationhood and identity formation. Each theme is explored with reference to the art forms studied—Patachitra, Nakshi Kantha, Rickshaw painting, and others. These findings are examined within the context of the study's objectives and the broader theoretical frameworks discussed in the introduction.

### Symbolism in Folk Art

The study's first theme focuses on the symbolism embedded in the selected folk-art forms. Patachitra, Nakshi Kantha, and Rickshaw paintings were analyzed for their use of symbols that reflect religious, cultural, and historical meanings, reinforcing national identity and cultural continuity.

### Findings

Patachitra scrolls use religious motifs drawn from both Hindu epics (e.g., Ramayana, Mahabharata) and Islamic saints. The coexistence of these motifs reflects the syncretic nature of Bangladeshi society, where Hindu and Muslim communities have coexisted and influenced one another for centuries (Rahman, 2018). The color symbolism red for power, green for fertility, and white for purity emphasizes the emotional and cultural importance of these artworks.

Nakshi Kantha also uses motifs of nature and protection, such as peacocks and lotuses, which carry meanings of fertility, protection, and cultural preservation (Ahmed, 2019). These symbols are not only decorative but also serve as a way for women in rural Bangladesh to transmit cultural memory through generational knowledge.

Rickshaw paintings, typical of urban settings like Dhaka and Chittagong, merge rural traditional imagery with modern symbols (e.g., political figures, movie stars), illustrating the hybridization of urban and rural identities. The use of Islamic calligraphy alongside images from

Hindu mythology represents the pluralistic nature of Bangladesh's urban spaces.

### Connection to Previous Studies

These findings align with Chowdhury (2021), who highlights the interfaith dialogue expressed in folk art, and Hasan (1983), who discusses the syncretic traditions in Bengali art. The use of symbolism to convey pluralism and shared cultural heritage supports the broader theme of art as a mediator of cultural diversity (Rahman & Islam, 2017).

### Cultural Pluralism

The second theme examines how folk art reflects cultural pluralism in Bangladesh. Through the integration of different religious and ethnic symbols, the selected art forms promote an inclusive national identity and serve as tools for social cohesion.

### Findings

Alpana, a form of floor art created during religious festivals, blends Muslim and Hindu motifs. Geometric patterns and floral designs are used in both Eid and Durga Puja celebrations, serving as a symbol of unity in religious diversity (Ahmed, 2019). The act of women creating Alpana during these occasions also emphasizes gendered cultural practices that mediate religious difference through shared aesthetic production.

Nakshi Kantha embroidery, largely created by rural women, is a means of cultural transmission. The motifs in Nakshi Kantha serve not only as symbols of protection and fertility but also as a way for women to assert their agency in the preservation of multi-religious narratives (Ahmed, 2019). The gendered aspect of this art form underscores the intersection of art, labor, and cultural preservation.

### Connection to Previous Studies

These findings echo Rahman (2018), who discusses how folk art acts as a medium for interfaith coexistence and the preservation of communal memory. The gendered aspect of Alpana and Nakshi Kantha also aligns with Ahmed (2019), who highlights the importance of women in maintaining cultural traditions and cultural pluralism.

### 3. Nationhood and Identity Formation

The final theme focuses on the role of folk art in the ongoing negotiation of Bangladesh's national identity. Folk art serves as a dynamic process of nation-building, where traditional and modern elements merge to create a shared national narrative.

### Findings

Rickshaw painting represents urban folk art, where traditional rural motifs blend with modern political and cultural symbols. This fusion reflects the negotiation of urban-rural identities within Bangladesh's modernization process (Khan, 2022). Rickshaw painting highlights the hybridity of identity in a rapidly urbanizing society and

contributes to the evolving national identity in Dhaka and other metropolitan areas.

Jatra theatre, a traditional folk theatre incorporating Hindu and Islamic stories, fosters communal dialogue and performs a pluralistic national identity. The performances highlight how shared narratives across sectarian lines contribute to national unity, emphasizing the fluidity of religious and cultural boundaries in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2021).

### Connection to Previous Studies

These findings are consistent with Rahman and Islam (2017), who suggest that folk art plays a significant role in the creation of national unity through cultural diversity. The study's findings support Khan (2022)'s assertion that folk art is not a static tradition but an evolving form that contributes to contemporary urban identities.

### Study Boundaries

While the study offers important insights into the role of folk art in shaping national identity and reflecting cultural pluralism in Bangladesh, it has some limitations. The focus on three specific art forms (Patachitra, Nakshi Kantha, and Rickshaw painting) means that the findings may not fully represent the diversity of folk-art traditions across the country. Furthermore, the study's emphasis on rural and urban areas may exclude other regional variations in folk art practice. Future research could expand the scope to include other folk-art forms (such as Baul songs and pottery) and explore the impact of digital media on the evolution of folk art in Bangladesh.

The findings of this study underscore the central role of folk art in mediating national identity and cultural pluralism in Bangladesh. By examining the symbolism embedded in folk art and its function in fostering interfaith dialogue and social cohesion, the study highlights how folk art contributes to the construction of a pluralistic national identity. Through visual expressions, these art forms bridge the gap between urban and rural identities, religious differences, and cultural practices. The findings also affirm the importance of gendered cultural practices in preserving and transmitting cultural values, contributing to the continued relevance of folk art in nation-building.

### Discussions

This study demonstrates that Bangladeshi folk art serves as a powerful medium for negotiating cultural pluralism and national identity. The findings highlight the dynamic role of folk art in shaping and expressing Bangladesh's multifaceted cultural identity, which is continually evolving in response to socio-economic and political shifts. Folk art, as explored through the lenses of Patachitra, Nakshi Kantha, and Rickshaw painting, acts as both a repository of historical memory and a vehicle for expressing contemporary social realities.

### Cultural Pluralism and National Identity

The study confirms that Bangladeshi folk art is a living

tradition that reflects the nation's cultural diversity and pluralism. This pluralism is not merely historical, as some may suggest, but is an actively lived experience, manifested through art forms that integrate symbols from multiple religious and cultural traditions. The synthesis of Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and indigenous motifs within Patachitra, Nakshi Kantha, and Rickshaw paintings exemplifies the deep cultural interconnection that defines Bangladesh's identity. These art forms demonstrate how Bangladeshis navigate the complexities of religious pluralism and social diversity, creating a shared national identity through artistic expression (Rahman, 2018; Chowdhury, 2021). As seen in Jatra (folk theatre) and Rickshaw painting, folk art serves as a site of identity negotiation, where the intersection of rural traditions and modern urban identities is played out in public spaces (Khan, 2022; Rahman & Islam, 2017).

### The Role of Gender in Folk Art

A key aspect of the study is the examination of gendered cultural practices, particularly in Nakshi Kantha and Alpana. These art forms, primarily created by women, highlight the intersection of gender, culture, and artisanal labor. As artisans, women are central figures in the transmission and endurance of cultural traditions, contributing to the preservation of pluralistic narratives across generations (Ahmed, 2019). This finding resonates with cultural studies that emphasize the role of women as active agents in both cultural resistance and nation-building (Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation, 2025). The gendered dimension of folk art is a form of cultural agency, where women assert their cultural ownership and contribute to the collective national imagination. By maintaining and reinterpreting these traditions, women play an essential role in the continued relevance of folk art in the nation-building process.

### Urbanization, Globalization, and Hybridity in Folk Art

Rickshaw painting exemplifies the transformative power of folk art amidst urbanization and globalization. The study demonstrates how Rickshaw painting has evolved, blending traditional folk motifs with modern iconography, including political figures, celebrities, and popular cultural symbols. This fusion of traditional and contemporary imagery represents the negotiation of modern urban identities marked by migration, social diversity, and cultural exchange (Khan, 2022). Rickshaw painting serves as an essential marker of belonging in rapidly urbanizing cities like Dhaka, illustrating the ongoing process of identity formation in an increasingly globalized world (ActionAid Bangladesh, 2025; The Daily Star, 2025). This hybridity challenges conventional ideas of national identity and offers a new perspective on the role of folk art in reflecting the pluralistic nature of contemporary Bangladeshi society.

### Resilience and Adaptation of Folk Art

Despite the challenges of commercialization, changing economic conditions, and generational shifts, the study

finds that Bangladeshi folk art remains resilient. Folk traditions are not static relics of the past but adaptive practices that incorporate new themes, media, and contexts to maintain their relevance in contemporary society. As noted by Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation (2025), these art forms continuously evolve, adapting to the demands of a changing cultural and political landscape. The ability of folk art to incorporate new forms while maintaining its connection to traditional cultural practices demonstrates its continued importance in preserving national identity and cultural continuity in the face of globalization (Ijtema *et al.*, 2023).

### Contribution to Cultural Pluralism and Nationhood

The findings of this study make a significant contribution to the ongoing debates on cultural pluralism and nationhood in Bangladesh. By foregrounding folk art as a dynamic vessel of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), the study highlights how symbolic practices in everyday life help shape the nation's collective identity. Folk art offers an inclusive space for the expression of diversity, where different cultural traditions are woven together to form a cohesive yet pluralistic national identity. The symbolic practices in art, from Patachitra to Rickshaw painting, serve as visual languages that articulate the complexities of belonging, the intertwining of traditions, and the evolving nature of Bangladeshi nationhood.

### Study Boundaries and Future Directions

While this study provides important insights into the role of folk art in cultural pluralism and nation-building, it is not without its limitations. The focus on three specific art forms (Patachitra, Nakshi Kantha, and Rickshaw painting) means that the findings may not fully encompass the diversity of folk art traditions across the entire country. Future research could expand the scope to include other folk art forms, such as Baul songs, pottery, and textiles, and examine the influence of digital media and globalization on the evolution of traditional folk art in Bangladesh. Additionally, examining regional variations in folk art practice could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural pluralism is expressed across different areas of the country.

In conclusion, this study underscores the pivotal role of Bangladeshi folk art in negotiating cultural pluralism and national identity. By analyzing the symbolic meanings, cultural practices, and gendered dynamics of folk art, the study highlights how these art forms actively participate in the formation of a unified yet pluralistic national identity. Through a process of hybridization, interfaith dialogue, and cultural transmission, folk art in Bangladesh continues to reflect and shape the nation's ongoing journey toward social cohesion and cultural inclusivity. This research contributes to the broader field of cultural studies by demonstrating the dynamic and adaptive nature of folk art as a tool for expressing pluralism and nationhood in contemporary Bangladesh.

### Limitations

The present study has several limitations that contributed to constraints on the scope and depth of investigation. Fieldwork was affected by the practical extent of travel in remote rural areas and seasonal difficulties, as a result of which some folk art communities (eg, Patachitra and Nakshi Kantha) have been underrepresented (Kus Study, 2023). Furthermore, the lack of documentation and preservation of folk arts in Bangladesh limits the availability of archival materials and a comprehensive iconographic study, as many folk arts are living traditions that are not preserved as museum objects (BRAC University Study, 2017). As many of these heritage skills are threatened by socio-economic imperatives on traditional artisans, including poverty, migration, and declining youth participation, the continuing relevance and existence of folk crafts are increasingly complex for scholars to track over time (Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation, 2025). The research presented various interpretive complications in the translation of symbolic meanings expressed through indigenous language and community idiom, which may simplify (Academia Research, 2014). Furthermore, the various folk forms in Bangladesh are so diverse, ranging from village crafts to vibrant urban arts, such as rickshaw painting, that it was practically impossible to examine all of them thoroughly. However, this study only focused on essential and representative art forms (BRAC University Study, 2017). Finally, here is a folk art stage in so much flux, partly because of swift urbanization and globalization, that it is increasingly complex to leave behind an everlasting essence of these traditions in times to come, too (Khan 2022). Within the constraints and challenges stated, the paper presents original and detailed evidence of how symbology and cultural pluralism are articulated in Bangladeshi folk painting, which may serve as an epitome for future research.

### CONCLUSION

This study reveals the dynamic and pluralistic nature of Bangladeshi folk art, which serves as a vital medium for expressing the nation's diverse cultural narratives. Folk art, which blends Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and indigenous motifs, reflects a rich history of interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange, illustrating Bangladesh's complex and evolving national identity. From rural traditions like Patachitra and Nakshi Kantha to urban forms like Rickshaw painting, folk art not only adapts to social, political, and economic changes but also remains a living, dynamic practice that contributes to the nation's pluralistic identity.

Particularly, gendered art forms like Alpana and Nakshi Kantha are essential for preserving cultural memory, transmitting pluralistic values, and empowering women within their communities. This reinforces the role of folk art as a significant force for social cohesion and cultural inclusion. The study emphasizes the need for continued recognition and support for folk art, which sustains Bangladesh's pluralistic fabric.

Ultimately, Bangladeshi folk art remains a vibrant testament to the nation's pluralistic spirit, connecting the past and present while fostering a collective national identity through its evolving symbolic practices. This research underscores the significance of preserving these living traditions in maintaining the nation's cultural integrity and unity.

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