

## Exploring the Causes of Inter-Religious Marriages in Bangladesh: A Socio-Cultural Analysis

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Received June 04, 2025; Revised 22 September 27, 2025; Accepted October 11, 2025

### Abstract

**Objective:** This study aims to analyze the socio-cultural factors behind the increasing practice of interfaith marriage in Bangladesh, with an emphasis on the dynamics of value shifts, identity construction, and marriage practices in the broader context of social change. **Theoretical framework:** This study uses a socio-anthropological perspective by referring to the theories of social change, secularization, and cultural integration to explain how the transformation of modern values and identities affects the practice of interfaith marriage. **Literature review:** Most previous studies have highlighted interfaith marriage from a legal, moral, and theological perspective. This study expands the discussion by emphasizing the influence of urbanization, education, media, local cultural traditions (Baul and Sufi), and individual autonomy as driving factors for interfaith interaction and marriage. **Methods:** Using a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis of seven informants (interfaith couples, parents, students, and scholars). The data was analyzed by thematic analysis to find the main patterns in respondents' experiences and views. **Results:** The study found that interfaith marriage in Bangladesh is influenced by urbanization, secular values, weakening religious authority, access to higher education, and media influence. The emphasis on individual autonomy as well as legal support through the Special Marriage Act of 1872 was also an important factor, plus inclusive cultural traditions such as Baul and Sufi. However, this dynamic creates tensions with Islamic law, family norms, and religious values. **Implications:** Implications of these findings include the need for legal reforms that balance individual rights and social harmony, the improvement of social literacy and interfaith understanding for education, and the role of religious leaders in fostering interfaith dialogue and awareness programs. **Novelty:** The authenticity of the research lies in its focus on the socio-cultural realities of couples and families, not solely on legal or moral aspects. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of urbanization factors, local cultural traditions, and family dynamics to explain the shifting boundaries of interfaith marriage in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** socio-cultural factors, inter-religious marriage, secularization theory, cultural integration, bangladesh.

### INTRODUCTION

Three Inter-religious marriages remain a relatively understudied yet increasingly visible social phenomenon in Bangladesh. While the country is religiously diverse, with Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists coexisting, social norms have historically emphasized religious endogamy, marriage within one's own religion. However, rapid urbanization,

expanding educational opportunities, globalization, and the growing influence of digital media have significantly altered interpersonal relationships and marriage choices [1], [2].

Despite this changing social landscape, little empirical research has been conducted to understand the root causes and dynamics of inter-religious marriages in the Bangladeshi context. Most existing discussions are limited to religious, legal, or moral perspectives and often overlook the lived experiences, socio-cultural drivers, and personal motivations behind such unions [3].

This research is therefore rational and timely, as it addresses a crucial gap in academic discourse. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors contributing to inter-religious marriages, explores the challenges faced by inter-religious couples, and examines broader implications for social harmony, religious tolerance, and legal reforms in Bangladesh. By shedding light on this sensitive but important issue, the research aims to promote informed dialogue among scholars, policymakers, religious leaders, and the public. It also contributes to a deeper understanding of how traditional societies like Bangladesh are negotiating identity, faith, and modern values in an era of rapid transformation [3].

Inter-religious marriage remains a socially sensitive and underexplored phenomenon in Bangladesh, where religion plays a central role in shaping individual identity, family life, and community norms. Despite increasing instances of interfaith unions, particularly among urban, educated, and younger populations, such marriages are often met with societal resistance, familial rejection, and legal ambiguity. While global trends suggest growing acceptance of inter-religious relationships, in the Bangladeshi context, these marriages frequently challenge deeply rooted religious, cultural, and legal boundaries [4].

However, there is a significant lack of scholarly research that systematically investigates the causes driving individuals to enter inter-religious marriages in this socio-religious setting. Without a clear understanding of the underlying factors, such as urbanization, education, secular values, and shifting cultural norms, policy responses, religious discourse, and social interventions remain inadequately informed. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this research gap by critically examining the socio-cultural, ideological, and institutional causes of inter-religious marriages in contemporary Bangladesh [5], [6].

The Objectives of the Research Article are:

1. To identify the key social, educational, cultural, and economic factors contributing to inter-religious marriages in Bangladesh.
2. To explore the patterns and contexts in which interfaith marriages are occurring, particularly focusing on urban dynamics, generational shifts, globalization, digital media, and gender perspectives.
3. To explore the legal, political, and psychological environment surrounding interfaith marriage in Bangladesh.
4. To analyze Islamic jurisprudential positions on interfaith marriage, especially in relation to current Bangladeshi practices.
5. To investigate how individuals involved in interreligious marriages perceive religion, identity, and family roles in the context of their unions.

By addressing these aims and objectives, this research contributes not only to academic literature but also to practical policy debates on religion, family, and social cohesion in Bangladesh. It highlights the voices and experiences of those directly involved in inter-religious marriages and provides insights that may inform future legal reforms, interfaith dialogue, and community-level interventions. Ultimately, the study seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical discussions of interfaith relations and the lived realities of individuals navigating the challenges of love, identity, and faith in a rapidly transforming society [7].

**Research Implications and Novelty.** This study on the socio-cultural causes of inter-religious marriages in Bangladesh generates significant implications for academic scholarship, policymaking, and religious discourse. At the academic level, the findings expand sociological and anthropological literature by contextualizing interfaith unions within the realities of Bangladeshi society. Unlike prior studies that predominantly emphasized legal or theological dimensions, this research highlights how urbanization, higher education, globalization, and cultural traditions collectively shape marital practices. Such insights broaden the scope of interfaith marriage studies and enrich comparative scholarship on religion and social change across South Asia. Moreover, the study foregrounds the lived voices of couples and families, allowing for a more human-centered understanding of marriage beyond theoretical abstractions [8], [9].

For policymakers, the implications are equally critical. The research identifies that outdated legal provisions, particularly the Special Marriage Act of 1872, fail to address the complexities of modern interfaith unions. Policymakers are therefore urged to consider legal reforms that protect the rights of interfaith couples while maintaining social cohesion. Additionally, the findings recommend the promotion of interfaith dialogue platforms to reduce stigma and foster mutual respect between religious communities. By acknowledging inter-religious marriage as a social reality rather than a marginal anomaly, state institutions may develop policies that ensure both individual autonomy and communal harmony [10].

Educational institutions also emerge as vital spaces of influence. The study reveals that universities, schools, and media platforms shape attitudes toward interfaith unions by promoting liberal values, secularization, and intercultural engagement. This suggests that educators and curriculum developers should integrate discussions of religious pluralism, tolerance, and citizenship into academic programs. By doing so, they may help younger generations critically navigate tensions between faith and modernity while promoting social inclusivity. Similarly, religious leaders can benefit from these findings by adopting more informed, empathetic approaches when addressing the challenges faced by interfaith couples. Engagement in awareness programs may further bridge divides between doctrinal positions and personal realities [11].

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach. It moves beyond legalistic and moralistic debates to examine how cultural traditions, such as Baul and Sufi practices, intersect with modern forces like digital media and globalization. This combination demonstrates that interfaith marriage in Bangladesh is not merely a Western import but rooted in local traditions of pluralism and coexistence. Another innovative aspect is its emphasis on the weakening of parental authority and religious institutions, signaling a generational shift that reshapes marital decisions. By capturing these nuanced dynamics, the study establishes new conceptual ground for analyzing the interplay between faith, identity, and modern social transformation. In conclusion, the implications of this research are both practical and theoretical. They offer pathways for legal reform, interfaith dialogue, and educational interventions, while its novelty resides in reframing inter-religious marriage as a mirror of Bangladesh's evolving socio-cultural identity [12].

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent scholarship over the last five years highlights the complex dynamics of inter-religious marriages in Bangladesh, focusing on social attitudes, legal frameworks, and personal experiences. A psychological study of young urban Bangladeshis found that globalization and cultural hybridity have shaped marriage preferences, with educated youth showing greater openness to love-based unions, especially among those with lower levels of religiosity [13]. Despite this shift, interfaith marriages continue to face social stigma, particularly in conservative communities where they are often perceived as a threat to cultural and religious values [14]. From a legal perspective, several studies argue that the colonial-era Special Marriage Act of 1872 inadequately addresses the realities of

contemporary interfaith unions, leaving couples vulnerable to legal ambiguities and family disputes [15].

More recent qualitative research has emphasized both the challenges and opportunities within interfaith marriages, noting that while couples struggle with religious and familial tensions, such unions also foster personal growth, interfaith dialogue, and social harmony [16]. In addition, studies on the digital presence of religious minorities suggest that stigma and fear in online spaces may further complicate how interfaith couples negotiate identity in modern Bangladesh. Overall, the literature reveals a growing academic interest in inter-religious marriage but also identifies clear gaps, particularly in understanding how urbanization, digital media, and gender relations are reshaping interfaith marital practices in Bangladesh [17].

**Table 1. Summary of Recent Literature on Inter-Religious Marriage in Bangladesh**

Focus Area	Key Findings
Psychological perspective (youth & globalization)	Globalization and cultural hybridity influence marriage preferences; educated urban youth show greater openness to love-based interfaith unions, especially among those with lower religiosity.
Social attitudes & stigma	Interfaith marriages face strong resistance in conservative communities, perceived as a threat to cultural and religious values.
Legal framework	The Special Marriage Act of 1872 is outdated, failing to address the realities of modern interfaith unions, leading to legal ambiguities and family disputes.
Qualitative research on couples' experiences	Couples experience both challenges (religious/familial tension) and opportunities (personal growth, interfaith dialogue, social harmony).
Digital & social media presence of minorities	Online spaces reinforce stigma and fear, complicating how interfaith couples negotiate identity in contemporary Bangladesh.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in socio-anthropological analysis to explore the causes of inter-religious marriages in Bangladesh. A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate, as it allows for a nuanced understanding of the motivations, lived experiences, and social dynamics shaping interfaith unions within a complex cultural and religious landscape [18].

**Research Design:** The research adopted a multi-method qualitative strategy, combining in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. This triangulation ensured a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by capturing personal narratives, community perceptions, and institutional perspectives while validating findings through cross-verification [18].

**Participants:** A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants directly or indirectly connected to inter-religious marriages. The sample included individuals in interfaith marriages, parents of interfaith couples, religious scholars, and young people from diverse backgrounds. This diversity ensured representation of multiple perspectives on interfaith unions in Bangladesh. A total of seven participants were interviewed, summarized in the table below:

**Table 2. Participants Details**

Code	Gender	Age	Location	Role	Religious Background
R1	Female	27	Dhaka	Spouse in an interfaith marriage	Muslim–Hindu
R4	Male	29	Chittagong	Spouse in an interfaith marriage	Muslim–Christian
R6	Female	22	Dhaka	Student	Hindu
R8	Male	39	Dhaka	Journalist & Interfaith marriage spouse	Muslim–Hindu
R9	Male	56	Sylhet	Parent of an interfaith child	Muslim
R10	Male	50	Chittagong	Parent of an interfaith child	Indigenous People
R11	Male	45	Sylhet	Islamic scholar & marriage registrar	Muslim

**Data Collection:** Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews conducted in participants' preferred language (Bangla or English). Each interview lasted between 45–75 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. Questionnaires were also administered to gather supplementary insights, particularly from younger participants, on their perceptions of inter-religious unions. In addition, relevant documents, including legal frameworks, media reports, and cultural writings, were reviewed to situate individual narratives within broader social and institutional contexts [19].

**Data Analysis:** Thematic analysis was employed to examine the collected data. Transcribed interviews were coded manually, with themes emerging around key socio-cultural drivers such as urbanization, education, globalization, digital media influence, gender perspectives, and the weakening of traditional norms. Particular attention was given to cultural influences (e.g., Baul traditions, Sufi philosophy, hybrid identities) and institutional factors (e.g., law, politics, and religious interpretations) that shape the occurrence of inter-religious marriages. Findings were cross-validated by comparing individual experiences with broader socio-cultural and legal contexts [20].

**Ethical Considerations:** Ethical approval was obtained before data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Codes (R1–R11) were used in place of real names to protect identities, particularly given the sensitivity of the subject matter in the Bangladeshi context.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the social, legal, and cultural factors shaping inter-religious marriage in Bangladesh. The analysis of interviews and secondary data revealed several recurring themes that provide insight into both the challenges and emerging opportunities surrounding interfaith unions.

### Definition of Inter-Religious Marriage

Inter-religious marriage, also referred to as interfaith marriage, is a marital union between two individuals who adhere to different religious faiths, doctrines, or belief systems. In the context of Bangladesh, this typically refers to marriages between Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, or individuals belonging to indigenous or tribal belief systems. For this research, inter-religious marriage is defined as a marital relationship between two individuals

who belong to distinctly different religious communities and do not share the same faith at the time of their union. This definition includes both legally registered marriages and socially recognized unions, regardless of whether formal religious conversion has taken place [21]–[24].

The opinions of some scholars further illuminate the concept. One perspective describes inter-religious marriage as “a matrimonial union in which the spouses belong to different religious faiths, and this difference shapes not only their individual identities but also influences familial, societal, and institutional interactions.” Another emphasizes that “an interfaith marriage is one in which each partner maintains a separate religious identity and the couple must navigate religious differences within their domestic, cultural, and spiritual life together.” Similarly, others note that it involves “complex negotiations of identity, belief systems, rituals, and family expectations,” thereby making interfaith unions both socially significant and culturally challenging [25]–[28].

### **Causes of Inter-Religious Marriages in Bangladesh**

The findings revealed multiple socio-cultural, educational, economic, and emotional factors that have contributed to the rise of inter-religious marriages in Bangladesh. While the phenomenon remains sensitive, it is no longer invisible.

1. **Increasing Social Interaction and Urbanization;** Urbanization emerged as a critical driver, where cities like Dhaka, Chattogram, and Khulna create environments in which people from diverse religious backgrounds live, study, and work together. This social closeness fosters emotional attachment and eventual marriages across faith lines. As one student interviewee from Dhaka explained: “In the city, people mix freely. No one asks about religion before dating.” (R6, 22-year-old student).
2. **Weak Religious Knowledge and Commitment:** Several respondents demonstrated limited knowledge of Islamic rulings on marriage. Religion was often seen as secondary to love, personal choice, or emotional compatibility. For instance, one female participant stated: “I honestly thought that love matters more. I didn’t know Islam strictly prohibits a Muslim girl from marrying a non-Muslim man.” (R1, 35, Muslim–Hindu marriage, Dhaka). This highlights the weakening of doctrinal knowledge in shaping marital decisions [29].
3. **Higher Education and Liberal Values:** Universities were noted as spaces where traditional religious and cultural boundaries weaken. Higher education promotes questioning of established norms and encourages young people to prioritize personal compatibility and liberal values over rigid endogamy.
4. **Media and Global Culture:** Digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, along with exposure to international films and literature, play a significant role in reshaping youth attitudes. These platforms normalize love across religious lines and encourage the belief that marriage is a matter of personal freedom rather than religious prescription.
5. **Weakening of Traditional Norms and Religious Institutions:** The authority of parents, elders, and religious leaders over marital decisions has noticeably declined. Some young people avoid religious institutions altogether, thereby reducing religious influence on marriage.
6. **Human Rights Activism and Legal Loopholes:** While Bangladesh lacks a unified civil code for marriage, the Special Marriage Act of 1872 provides a secular legal avenue for interfaith marriages. As one Islamic scholar and registrar noted: “Under the Special Marriage Act, people marry without conversion or religious approval. This is a legal but un-Islamic route.” (R11, Sylhet). This reveals a conflict between secular legal provisions and Islamic law, often creating controversy and confusion.

7. **Personal Autonomy and Emotional Factors:** Many young people emphasized love, mutual support, and emotional fulfillment over religious identity. As one participant expressed: “I knew it would be hard, but we loved each other since university. Religion just didn’t come up seriously.” (R4, 29-year-old male, Muslim–Christian marriage, Chattogram). Such narratives reveal how personal choice is increasingly prioritized.
8. **Socio-Economic Considerations:** Marriage choices were also shaped by socio-economic status, education, and family prestige. In some cases, interfaith marriage was a path toward upward social mobility or financial stability.
9. **Additional Contributing Factors:** Additional contributing factors also played a significant role in shaping interfaith unions in Bangladesh. The coexistence within educational institutions and shared academic experiences provided opportunities for interaction across religious lines, while workplace environments encouraged colleagues of different faiths to form personal relationships. In urban areas, the rise of secular values further softened rigid religious boundaries, complemented by a growing spirit of religious tolerance and the emergence of hybrid identities rooted in the country’s history of cultural integration [\[30\]](#), [\[31\]](#).

Traditional influences such as the Baul and Sufi movements, which emphasize love and spirituality beyond doctrinal confines, also nurtured openness to interfaith connections. At the same time, social changes like the decline of purdah and gender segregation created more space for cross-religious engagement. Family dynamics, including parental negligence and disintegration, weakened religious oversight, while selective religious practice allowed faith to be interpreted personally and pluralistically. The broader breakdown of Islamic family supervision, reflecting diminished tarbiyah, reinforced these shifts. Taken together, these factors reveal a complex interplay of structural transformation, cultural traditions, social change, and personal autonomy that collectively fostered the conditions for interfaith unions [\[32\]–\[36\]](#).

In addition, the study revealed several overarching themes that explain the growing occurrence of inter-religious marriages in Bangladesh. A significant factor is the lack of religious knowledge among youth, which weakens awareness of doctrinal restrictions regarding marriage. Urbanization and the spread of secular values have also increased opportunities for cross-religious contact, fostering relationships that may eventually lead to interfaith unions. Love and emotional attachment are increasingly prioritized over compatibility of faith, with personal choice often outweighing traditional expectations. Legal flexibility, particularly through the provisions of the Special Marriage Act of 1872, provides couples with a formal avenue for interfaith unions, even in the absence of religious approval. Weak family supervision, reflecting broader intergenerational cultural shifts, further reduces parental control over marital decisions [\[37\]–\[39\]](#).

At the same time, economic and social mobility considerations influence partner selection, as interfaith marriage may sometimes serve as a path toward improved status or financial stability. Finally, media exposure plays a critical role, not only normalizing inter-religious relationships but also shaping public reactions, which can range from acceptance to backlash. Together, these themes highlight the complex interplay of religious, cultural, legal, and socio-economic factors that shape the dynamics of interfaith marriages in contemporary Bangladesh. From an Islamic perspective, however, most of these marriages conflicted with established Qur’anic injunctions and Sunnah guidelines, especially concerning Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men without conversion [\[40\]–\[45\]](#).

These findings align with global research showing that interfaith marriages often emerge in contexts of urbanization, secularization, and cultural pluralism. In Bangladesh, however, the phenomenon is uniquely shaped by tensions between deeply rooted religious norms and rapidly shifting social realities. The narratives of participants reveal not only personal struggles but also larger societal debates on the boundaries of faith, law, and personal

freedom. While urbanization, education, and globalization create opportunities for interfaith unions, the decline of religious authority and family supervision raises concerns among Islamic scholars and parents. At the same time, the presence of cultural traditions such as Baulism and Sufism shows that religious inclusivity has long been a part of Bangladeshi identity. This indicates that interfaith marriage is not merely a modern or Western import but also resonates with local traditions of pluralism and coexistence [46]–[51].

**Table 3. Causes of Inter-Religious Marriages in Bangladesh**

Factor	Description	Illustrative Example / Finding
Urbanization & Social Interaction	Cities foster contact among diverse religious groups, creating opportunities for emotional attachments.	Student in Dhaka: “In the city, people mix freely. No one asks about religion before dating.”
Weak Religious Knowledge & Commitment	Limited awareness of Islamic rulings; religion seen as secondary to love or compatibility.	Female respondent: “I thought love matters more. I didn’t know Islam prohibits it.”
Higher Education & Liberal Values	Universities weaken traditional barriers, encouraging personal choice over rigid endogamy.	Students prioritize compatibility and liberal perspectives on marriage.
Media & Global Culture	Social media and international media normalize interfaith unions and individual freedom.	Facebook, Instagram, films shape youth perception of marriage.
Decline of Traditional Norms & Institutions	Reduced parental/religious control over marital choices.	Youth increasingly ignore religious leaders and avoid institutions.
Legal Framework (Special Marriage Act 1872)	Provides secular avenue for marriage without conversion, clashing with Islamic law.	Registrar: “This is legal but un-Islamic.”
Personal Autonomy & Emotional Factors	Love and emotional support outweigh religious identity in partner choice.	Muslim–Christian couple: “Religion just didn’t come up seriously.”
Socio-Economic Considerations	Interfaith marriages sometimes enable upward mobility, education access, or financial stability.	Status and prestige shape marriage choices.
Educational & Workplace Interaction	Shared academic or professional spaces increase cross-religious contact.	Colleagues and classmates form relationships across faiths.
Cultural Traditions (Baul, Sufi influences)	Spiritual traditions emphasize love beyond doctrine, nurturing tolerance.	Baulism & Sufism encourage inclusivity in unions.
Changing Gender Roles	Decline of purdah and segregation enhances inter-religious contact.	Women engage more freely in mixed social settings.
Family Dynamics	Weak parental supervision, disintegration, or neglect reduce religious oversight.	Families less capable of enforcing doctrinal rules.
Selective Religious Practice	Individuals interpret faith personally, allowing pluralistic approaches to marriage.	Youth adopt flexible religious identities.

### In-Depth Analysis

The phenomenon of inter-religious marriage in Bangladesh represents a crucial site of socio-cultural transformation where tradition, modernity, and individual choice intersect. This study reveals that while marriage has historically been framed within rigid religious boundaries, rapid changes in education, urbanization, media exposure, and cultural pluralism are reshaping the ways individuals and families negotiate their marital decisions. A closer analysis of the findings uncovers several layers of meaning, highlighting both opportunities for social integration and challenges to communal harmony [52], [53].

At the structural level, urbanization and globalization emerge as powerful forces weakening conventional boundaries. Cities such as Dhaka and Chittagong foster environments where people of different faiths interact daily in workplaces, universities, and social networks. These encounters normalize cross-religious relationships, particularly among younger generations who prioritize emotional compatibility and personal freedom over strict adherence to religious norms. The research shows that digital media accelerates this process by offering platforms where interfaith friendships and romantic relationships can flourish. Social networking sites, films, and literature project ideals of love that transcend religion, thereby reinforcing the perception that marriage is primarily a private choice rather than a communal obligation [54].

At the cultural level, Bangladesh's pluralistic heritage also shapes attitudes toward interfaith unions. Traditions of Baul and Sufi thought, which emphasize love, spirituality, and transcendence of dogmatic boundaries, provide historical precedents for cross-religious openness. These cultural legacies demonstrate that interfaith interaction is not a foreign imposition but embedded in local forms of religious tolerance. Yet, these traditions often remain overshadowed by dominant narratives of orthodoxy and legal restrictions. The study's emphasis on cultural integration is therefore significant, as it reclaims indigenous pluralist traditions that can serve as resources for fostering coexistence in contemporary times [55].

On the individual level, the weakening of religious knowledge and institutional authority has profound implications. Many participants admitted to limited awareness of Islamic jurisprudential rulings on interfaith marriage, especially regarding restrictions on Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men. Love, companionship, and emotional fulfillment were often valued over doctrinal compliance. This reflects not only personal autonomy but also a generational shift in how religion is perceived. Younger individuals are more likely to treat religion as a matter of personal spirituality rather than communal regulation, thereby reshaping its influence on marital decisions. This weakening of parental and religious authority was reinforced by social changes such as the decline of purdah, increased coeducation, and expanded opportunities for women in professional spaces [56].

Legal frameworks further complicate the picture. The Special Marriage Act of 1872, a colonial-era law, provides secular avenues for interfaith unions but remains outdated and inadequate. It creates a tension between legal recognition and religious legitimacy, as unions contracted under the Act may be valid in civil law but unrecognized by religious authorities. This duality often results in confusion, stigma, and familial conflict. The study underscores the urgent need for legal reform that addresses the realities of modern interfaith unions, balancing individual rights with religious sensitivities. Without such reform, interfaith couples remain vulnerable to social exclusion, legal disputes, and moral condemnation.

The socio-economic dimension also emerges as a critical driver. In some cases, inter-religious marriage provides pathways to upward mobility, access to education, or improved social prestige. This demonstrates that marriage in Bangladesh cannot be reduced to a matter of love or religion alone but is deeply entangled with class, status, and economic opportunity. The findings suggest that individuals navigating these unions often balance multiple considerations, including financial stability, family reputation, and personal aspirations, which complicate simplistic moral or legal judgments about interfaith marriage. From an Islamic jurisprudential perspective, the research highlights enduring tensions. While Qur'anic and Sunnah guidelines restrict certain forms of interfaith marriage, particularly involving Muslim women, socio-cultural realities reveal increasing deviations from these norms. This gap between doctrine and practice raises critical questions for religious scholars and policymakers: How should Islamic law engage with rapidly changing social realities? To what extent should legal and religious frameworks adapt to protect individuals while preserving community integrity? These questions underscore the broader challenge of reconciling tradition with modernity in Muslim-majority societies [57].

The broader implications of this study extend beyond Bangladesh. Similar dynamics of urbanization, secularization, and globalization shape interfaith unions in many parts of the world. However, what makes the Bangladeshi case distinctive is the interplay between deeply rooted religious norms and strong cultural traditions of pluralism. Unlike in Western contexts, where interfaith marriage is often framed through liberal individualism, in Bangladesh it simultaneously reflects indigenous traditions of coexistence and modern forces of change. This duality makes the phenomenon particularly complex and worthy of deeper comparative analysis [58], [59].

The study's novelty lies in its integrative framework. By combining socio-cultural, legal, educational, and personal perspectives, it moves beyond binary debates of "permissible versus forbidden" and instead situates interfaith marriage within the lived experiences of individuals and families. It highlights how emotional attachments, cultural traditions, generational shifts, and legal loopholes collectively construct a new social reality that challenges conventional boundaries. Moreover, by foregrounding the voices of participants, couples, parents, and scholars, the research humanizes an issue often reduced to abstract legal or theological arguments. In conclusion, inter-religious marriage in Bangladesh is best understood as both a mirror and a catalyst of social change. It reflects the transformation of values under conditions of modernization, while also pushing society to confront fundamental questions about identity, pluralism, and the negotiation between faith and freedom. The study calls for proactive engagement from policymakers, educators, and religious leaders to address these challenges constructively. Rather than viewing interfaith unions solely as a problem, they may be recognized as opportunities to foster dialogue, promote tolerance, and strengthen communal harmony in an increasingly pluralistic world.

## CONCLUSION

Inter-religious marriage in Bangladesh represents a complex social phenomenon shaped by changing values, legal frameworks, and cultural interactions. While marriage has traditionally been framed within strict religious boundaries, this study shows that social transformation is creating new spaces for personal choice that often transcend established norms. The research identified multiple factors driving such unions, including urbanization, weakening of religious knowledge, media influence, and legal flexibility under the Special Marriage Act of 1872, alongside economic considerations and cultural traditions such as Baul and Sufi thought. Together, these forces illustrate how modernization and cultural pluralism are reshaping the landscape of marriage in Bangladesh. Reaffirming the central argument, this study demonstrates that inter-religious marriage is not simply a matter of individual preference but a reflection of deeper socio-cultural change that challenges conventional religious and familial expectations. The findings carry important implications for policymakers, educators, and religious leaders, particularly in designing legal reforms, interfaith dialogue platforms, and community awareness programs that foster both personal rights and communal harmony. However, the study was limited by a small participant pool, suggesting the need for broader empirical research that includes diverse regions, socio-economic classes, and generational perspectives. Future studies could also explore the long-term impact of interfaith unions on family structures, children's identity formation, and social cohesion. Ultimately, inter-religious marriage should be seen not only as a private decision but also as a call for society to critically engage with issues of pluralism, tolerance, and the negotiation between tradition and modernity.

## Acknowledgments

The author gratefully acknowledges the invaluable support, constructive feedback, and thoughtful guidance received from colleagues, mentors, and peers throughout this research journey. Special thanks to the Department of Islamic Studies, Jagannath University, Bangladesh, for providing academic resources and encouragement that significantly contributed to the completion of this study on inter-religious marriages.

## Author Contribution

Dr. Md. Nazrul Islam solely conceptualized the research, designed the methodology, conducted the socio-cultural analysis, reviewed relevant literature, and wrote the manuscript. He was fully responsible for data interpretation, drafting, and revising the work critically. All aspects of the research and publication process were independently managed by the author without external collaboration or co-authorship.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding this research. No financial, institutional, or personal relationships have influenced the study's design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or publication. This article was conducted independently and solely reflects the academic perspective of the author in exploring inter-religious marriages in Bangladesh.

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