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## ABSTRACT

Traditional activity is the reflection of a country's culture. Flying kites is a tradition of Bangladeshi culture. Over the decade, it has lost its previous stand [1]. So, it is rational to re-evaluate its tradition, culture, emotional attachment to the local community, social relations, and myth. The specific objectives were: assessing the perception (views and speculations) of the senior citizens who have witnessed the changing fortunes of this tradition, exploring the current practice and perception of traditional Bangladeshi culture of flying kites among practitioners and non-practitioners and comparing the perception of flying kites as traditional Bangladeshi culture among seniors and the current generation.

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# Perception and Practice on Flying Kite as Traditional Cultural Game: A Study in Bangladesh

Md Faisal Hossain<sup>a</sup>, Nafiu Khalid<sup>a</sup> & Dr. Rafia Rahman<sup>b</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*Traditional activity is the reflection of a country's culture. Flying kites is a tradition of Bangladeshi culture. Over the decade, it has lost its previous stand [1]. So, it is rational to re-evaluate its tradition, culture, emotional attachment to the local community, social relations, and myth. The specific objectives were: assessing the perception (views and speculations) of the senior citizens who have witnessed the changing fortunes of this tradition, exploring the current practice and perception of traditional Bangladeshi culture of flying kites among practitioners and non-practitioners and comparing the perception of flying kites as traditional Bangladeshi culture among seniors and the current generation. This was a cross-section, quantitative and explorative study. The period was from January 2020 to August 2022 in eight divisions of Bangladesh. Senior citizens aged 60 to 85 and current generations aged 15 to 18 were the research respondents. A purposive and selective method of sampling was used in this research. After taking verbal informed consent to participate in this research, the research questions were asked and recorded. Selected 500 young individuals from all over the country randomly varied geographically: Urban, Suburban, and Rural. Forty senior citizens from eight divisions of Bangladesh were senior citizen respondents. A semi-structured set of questionnaires were prepared. Data collection techniques were: observational reporting, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews. The study explored that senior citizens perceive flying kites has seen a golden time in their life span, and they recommend it's very important to cherish this culture. Current citizens don't practice this culture of flying kites as they are engaged mostly in digital platforms for their leisure. The study*

*concludes with the recommendation that cultural societies are ardently required to come forward to keep this tradition alive. Further study is required to identify feasible approaches for the national stakeholders to leap into action.*

**Keywords:** kite, bangladeshi community, senior citizens, district, current generation.

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Culture shared social behaviours, beliefs, values, institutions, norms, customs, or practices – is the way of life of a group of people, learned by enculturation and socialization and presented in the form of material culture such as art, music, dance, habits, symbols, ritual, religion, technologies [2]. Kite flying in Bangladesh is part of the shared history and culture of the Indian subcontinent. The tradition of kite flying in undivided India is ancient and believed to have been brought into this country by Chinese travellers Huin Tsang and F Hien [3].

*In January 2012, the Bangladesh Kite Federation organized a National Kite Festival at Cox's Bazar Laboni Beach Point. The event was a great success, with a vast stretch of beach accommodating all the enthusiastic kite flyers and spectators, spectacular weather conditions, and a range of festivities. Besides, 'Shakrain' is observed yearly on Jan. 14-15 with thousands of colourful kites. Old Dhaka has been a venue for annual kite flying festivals going back to the Mughal era of Bangladesh. From the Nawabs of Subah Bangla of the Mughal Empire to Governor of 200 years of British rule, to the partition of British India and chained again as East Pakistan, to the victory of December 16, 1971[4]; the land was named*

differently with time but the culture, even after derivations, variations and changes, remains as the Culture of Bengal. Kite flying is a part of the unique culture of Bengal. Historically, every tradition is treated differently, but together form a lifestyle and an identity.

According to locals, with time, the festival has adapted new features. Only two days left till Shakrain, but the thrill of the festivities can be felt in the air of Luxmibazar, Shankari Bazaar, and Gandaria. A lot has changed during these years of celebrating it. Initially, Shakrain was all about sharing the joy of flying kites in the Poush (Bengali Season) air and enjoying the delightful tastes of winter pithas (cakes) with near and dear ones. Before the liberation war of 1971 and the birth of Bangladesh, Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan, British India, Subah Bangla, and Bengal.

Human values sculpt our decision-making, and our actions frame actions of posterity since a previous preference causes volition. Modernization does not mean leaving previous customs while coping with the new. "Kite-flying happens, but not on the same scale as before. The young adults and children -busy making kites in different shapes and colours, preparing threads while learning techniques to fly kites on the roof - are no longer a picture we get to see. Mahfuzur Rahman, General Secretary of Bangladesh Nriyashilpi Sangstha, thinks change is inevitable. "Everything in this world has gone through change or modification. Modification is tolerable to a certain extent, as long as the essence doesn't get lost," he added. The average flying and kite sales are not the same as before, proving people are shifting to new factors to celebrate their festivals. In the name of urbanization, technological advancements, digital substitutes, busy schedules, updated lifestyle and status, and lack of opportunity, the present generation is living virtually or caged. Due to lack of practices, many traditions or cultures like Kite Flying are on the way to extinction. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, kids ages 8-18 now spend, on average, a whopping 7.5 hours in front of a screen for entertainment each day, 4.5 of which are spent watching T.V. Over a year, that adds to 114 full days—watching a screen for fun [5].

The civilians focus more on the virtual world, hiding these practices from the present and upcoming generations in the dark and unknown. Development with the pace of the developing world is better but not leaving our social practices behind, which build our culture.

As there isn't any previous instance on the research of Bangladeshi kites, the methods used to approach the art historical point of view of kites were fully archival studies of papers that weren't particularly Bangladeshi by origin.

So, it is very rational to explore the practice and perception of the Bangladeshi community on their native traditional culture of kite flying.

#### *Objective:*

The study aims to explore the present practice and perception of the Bangladeshi community on their native traditional cultural flying of kites.

#### *Specific objectives:*

- To assess the perception (views and speculations) of the senior citizens who have witnessed the changing fortunes of this tradition.
- To explore the current practice and perception of traditional Bangladeshi culture of flying kites among practitioners and non-practitioners.
- To compare the perception of flying kites as traditional Bangladeshi culture among seniors and the current generation.

*Research question:* This study answers the question of "what is the current practice and perception of the Bangladeshi community on their native traditional culture of flying a kite?

The entire paper is organized in literature review, methodology, result and discussion, and conclusion and recommendation, following the scientific research steps.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *2.1 Kites in a World Perspective*

In the history of flight, the first lighter-than-air balloon (1783) and the first powered aircraft (1903) are very recent compared to kites' age [6].

The kite's exact dates and origin are unknown, but it is believed that they were flown in China for the first time.

The earliest written account of kite flying was about 200 B.C., when the Chinese General Han Hsin of the Han Dynasty flew a kite over the walls of a city, he was attacking to measure how far his army would have to tunnel to reach past the defences. Knowing this distance, his troops entered the city, surprised their enemy, and were victorious [7].

During World War I, the British, French, Italian, and Russian armies used kites for enemy observation and signalling [8]. The German Navy continued to use man-lifting box kites to increase the viewing range of surface-cruising submarines. In World War II, the U.S. Navy found several uses for kites. Harry Saul's Barrage Kite prevented aeroplanes from flying too low over targets. Pilots lost at sea raised the Gibson-Girl Box kite so they could be found. And Paul Garber's Target Kite, a sizeable steerable Diamond, was used for target practice and aircraft recognition at sea [9]. In Australia, the Festival of the Winds is an annual international kite flying event and competition held every September in Waverly, the famous beach suburb of Kingston [10]. In Micronesia, kite-flying is practised as a religious function. In Micronesian kite culture, Kite fishing is remarkable. Some of the earliest documentation of kite fishing comes via European explorers in the late 1500s, who witnessed Southeast Asian fishermen in a canoe using a kite and two lengths of cordage — one that served as kite line and one that served as fishing line [11]. In Brazil, the traditional kite is called 'Pipa.' In Chile, kites are very popular, especially during Independence Day festivities (September 18).

In Greece and Cyprus, flying kites is a tradition for Clean Monday, the first day of Lent. In the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda, traditional Bermuda kites are made and flown at Easter to symbolize Christ's ascent. In Fuerteventura, a kite festival is usually held on the weekend of November 8, lasting for three days. Washington State International Kite Festival is North America's largest kite flying celebration.

In Pakistan, kite flying is often known as Gudi-Bazi or Patang-Bazi [12]. Kite flying is a well-known ritual of spring festival celebration known as Jashn-e-Bahrain. Pakistan has its tradition of the Basant Kite Flying Festival, a springtime kite flying event during the Basant Panchami festival in Punjab [13].

In the Indian subcontinent, the practice of kite flying was gradually replaced by the sport of kite fighting with the arrival of Mughal rule. In 1610, after capturing Dhaka, the largest subdivision of the Mughal Empire was formed, including Bangladesh and a few Indian states [14]. From then, Bangladesh witnessed and absorbed the culture of the Mughals. Kite flying was one of the many different forms of entertainment of the elite people of Dhaka in the Mughal period.

It is customary to give gifts in Gujarat, and Gujarati pundits grant scholarships to students for higher studies in astrology and philosophy. Celebrated on January 14, Uttarayan also marks the biannual change in wind direction, an event crucial to the traders who have sailed from the coasts of Gujarat since the times of the Indus valley civilization [15].

In Maharashtra, Uttarayan is celebrated as the harvest festival. The custom is to exchange a sweet preparation called *til-polis*, or *til laddu*, a sweet prepared of jaggery and sesame seed, as a token of love.

In Karnataka, the Kite festival is celebrated with families exchanging platters of sesame seeds mixed with fried groundnuts, jaggery, coconut pieces, candy, and sugarcane. This last symbolizes the sugarcane harvest, and the ritual is called Ellu Birodu [16].

In Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, kites are flown during Dussehra, which falls in mid-October or early November, to celebrate the victory of good over evil. Basant Panchmi, the arrival of spring, is celebrated in the Punjab region (both in India and Pakistan) with the flying of yellow kites.

Delhi flies kites on August 15 to celebrate the nation's Independence. On this day, kite flying is symbolic of the freedom to soar, alongside the

responsibility to control and sustain one's progress, to reach greater heights as a nation. Kites are often flown in the capital during the Republic Day celebrations of January 26 [17].

## 2.2 Introduction to Bangladeshi kites and related festivities

After 1971, Independence allowed us to modify and structurize our culture. In Bangladesh, Shakrain Festival is nationally celebrated like Uttarayan. Though it is mainly celebrated around the southern regions of Dhaka, people of all localities celebrate it too. Especially at the Chittagong Festival, kite fighting is a favourite attraction where people from other localities come to challenge each other. During the dawn, beside the seashore, on a wood fire on the sides of the beach, the kites twinkle like evening stars over the setting Sun. In northern Bengal, especially in Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Mymensingh, kite

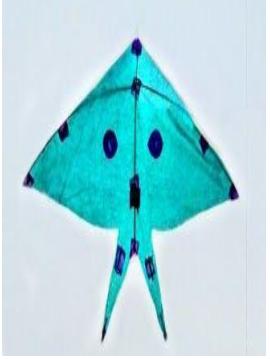
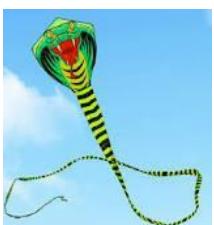
fighting organized by local organizations are well competitive and celebrated. In Khulna and Barisal, people, especially the children, fly kites competitively but not for particular purposes. In rural areas, kite flying is one of the mediums of outdoor recreation for children.

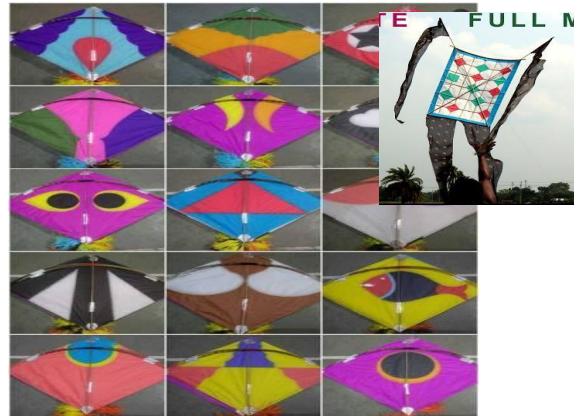
## 2.3 Classification and Etymology of Bangladeshi Kites

In Bangladesh, kite flying has been prevailing for three categorical purposes. They are primarily based on the difficulty level of making procedures of those kites. The genres are:

- Kites which children fly, i.e., very basic shaped kites
- Kites which are flown by adults for pastimes but are very artistic
- Kites which are made keeping the competitions in mind

We found 50 distinguished kites in practice; these are:

Shapes	Names	Kites
Triangle (stand)	Rupchanda Kite, Diamond Kite, Shapa (hapa, haipa, haipe), Snake	   

Rectangle	<p>Patang (Dui kuada, Gayaldar, Shadadar, Lovedar, Nakdar, Chokhdar, Chikonchokhdar, Maldar, ShalerGhuri, Gorudar, Kolshilej, Machlej), Chong, Duari, Guddi, Koure</p>	 
Square	<p>Lonthon, Multibox (Baksho), Square(cross shola), Cellular Ghuri</p>	
Circle	<p>Rotor kite (ghinni kite), Fanush</p>	

Complex	<p>Humanoid (cartoon characters mickey mouse, Doraemon), Turtle, Bat, Boat, Aeroplane, Eagle, Butterfly, Top, Umbrella, Star, Fish, Dragonfly, Jet, Bee kite, Bird, Rocket, Feiska (feiskuilla), Dragon, Octopus, Flower, Carambola</p>	
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### III. METHODOLOGY

This was a cross-section, quantitative and explorative type of study. The period was from January 2020 to August 2022 in eight divisions of Bangladesh. Senior citizens aged 60 to 85 and current generations aged 15 to 18 were the research respondents. A purposive and selective method of sampling was used in this research. Five kite experts on flying kites in each division were the study's sample. Five (05) experts from each of eight divisions were sample size for

seniors, a total of [(8X5) =40] forty in number. After taking verbal informed consent to participate in this research, the research questions were asked and recorded. Selected 500 young individuals from all over the country randomly varied geographically: Urban, Suburban, and Rural. The researchers took the rural interviews in person because of the lack of a digital communication medium. The urban and suburban questionnaires were run through zoom meetings and social media texting. The answers

were recorded, assigning the responder's name with them. The interviewees did the questions voluntarily. A semi-structured set of questionnaires (enclosed in the annexure) we created was mainly to determine precisely the reason and time for the separation of Bengali people from the widespread practice of kite flying and, later on, to have a profoundly reflective analysis of the current situation of this complex culture. The questions were intentionally designed to be conversational to give the responders greater scope and turn while answering our questions. And every question reflected relevance to the targeted cultural practice: kite flying according to what they have experienced over the years. Data collection techniques were observational reporting, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### *4.1 Perception (views and speculations) of the senior citizens who have witnessed the changing fortunes of kite flying tradition:*

###### *4.1.1 Falling into the practice of kite flying*

When the survey of the kites was taken in 2021, the average responders of this sample size were in their 70s to 80s. The golden time, according to them, is between the 1960s-1970s, and that's when my subjects started to affiliate themselves with the practice of kite making and flying. The story goes before the liberation of Bangladesh in the 1950s. At that time, kite flying was practised in every locality (Zillas and Upazilas). Peer influencing was one of the fundamental outlying facts behind attracting more kids to share the pleasure of spending time flying a kite. In an interview, one senior named Franchise Hajong said in their 10s, they didn't have any virtual leisure time spending option available to them. Available options mostly revolved around outdoor sports and free movements with peers, allowing them to have in-person interactions regularly, transmitting the passion for kite flying from one individual to another. Bangladesh is a diversified nation with many tribes besides Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists. That allowed them to have a lot of mixed cultural festivals and gatherings from the onset of her journey. And this

allowed the spread of kite flying amongst the attendants of those festivals.

###### *4.1.2 Disseminating to the next generation*

The interviewees made the point clear that their immediately followed generation (the 1980s-1990s) had the same vigour and practices of kite flying and related festivities. According to the study subjects, this generation wasn't responsible for the changing fortune of kite flying. They didn't teach or instruct their kids in pen and paper to practice kite flying; instead, the social moulding automatically forebore that culture within them. But according to the senior citizens, the next generation of their kids means the 3rd generation was the one which started to drift away from kite flying.

###### *4.1.3 A radical change indeed*

The practice of kite flying and related culture is radically declining. Apart from the formal festivities, respondents didn't see any instance of kite flying other than in the villages in the last decade. The burning example they cited was 03 different spots: Sutrapur, Old Dhaka; Bhajahari Lodge, adjacent to Eye Care Hospital; central Jame Mosque, where it used to be a huge kite flying over the years. Unfortunately, those lively kite flying practices sites have long been lost entirely. Another example was the probable number of kites flown in the Shakrain festivals of Old Dhaka. In the 1980s, the number of kites flown two days in Shakrain used to be more than 10,000 in total, whereas the number of kites flown now is barely 1000. That too, apart from festivals, kite flying is quite rare.

##### *4.2 Current practice and perception of flying kites among practitioners and non-practitioners:*

###### *4.2.1 Familiarity with kites*

The observation indicates that the rural people are more interested and involved in kite culture than their urban and suburban counterparts. 95% of the rural surveyed claimed that they have flown a kite in their lifetime or seen someone flying a kite in person. This practice helps grow interests among others to have a try. Involvement and

practices are the main driving force behind the prevailing existence of kite culture in rural areas amongst the present generation. The perspective shifts radically in the sub-urban region. The response has a dramatic shift to 50% cases of encountering. Amongst 20% of suburban respondents, the idea of kite flying was still a foreign concept, while 30% had slight touch with this culture. The downward spiral in the trend of this material culture is predominant in the more densely populated and urbanized area. The metropolis lifestyles radically changed our way of thinking and options of alternate activities, which spoke itself when only 5% of urban respondents ever flew a kite; this too was possible because they had their early childhood in the rural areas.

#### *4.2.2 Kite flying heritage across family decedents*

The present generations were asked to recall the stories or anecdotes regarding kites flying from their fatherly figures. As predicted, it followed the same gradual declination until the urban respondents sparked an irregularity. Rural responders' heritage and tales of kites flying from their elders resonated in 100% of the survey. The rural respondents confirmed that 95% have indeed connected with their fore generations about this practice of kite flying; the rest, 5%, were not sure but hazily recalled getting the luck. The sub-urban interviewees also slowed 78% in their cohesion with kites following the footsteps of their elders. However, 22% of the respondents couldn't actively recall any such instance. In the urban counterpart, 50% of the responders assured us about hearing kite flying tales from their seniors in the family. But they didn't take any further interest in experiencing it alone.

#### *4.2.3 Kite flying as an outdoor recreation*

With the advancement of time and technology, young generations are not interested in the same leisure choices as before. Competitive industrial lives have allowed the present agers to advance towards a more readymade mode of indoor recreations, leaving behind the outdoor ones. It directly affected the practice of folklore activities, motivating the researchers to ask the respondents about their views of kite flying as outdoor

recreation. In rural regions, 90% were interested in kite flying at weekends. In Suburban and urban areas, the agreeability of flying a kite on a weekend day dropped to 60% and 40%, respectively. With a diverse array of leisure options and less acquaintance with kite flying, the young Bangladeshi generation of this era opted not to perform too many outdoor activities, including kite flying.

#### *4.3 The comparison of the seniors' and young generation's perspectives regarding kite flying culture:*

The research subject seniors' perspectives were broader in a subjective analysis. In contrast, the responses from the junior perspectives were more myopic and personal level reasons of their attachments/ not attachments with this hard culture. A declining trend in folklores was observed from rural to suburban to urban. The seniors did their best to disseminate this culture to the young generations (60% of the urban responders heard about their seniors sharing the tales of kite flying). Still, the course didn't gain widespread attention in urban areas. The main reason behind this is the reluctance of the urban youths to delve into this culture. It was bolstered when 60% of urban youngsters heard stories but showed no pragmatic interest in doing so.

## **V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Bangladesh has undergone a massive industrial revolution causing a reshuffle of the mass economy after the liberation war of 1971[18]. This phenomenon changed the lifestyle of people tremendously. Digital devices and indoor and outdoor sports from the western hemisphere were diluted with Bangladeshi cultural practices [19]. As mentioned earlier, the advent of cultural diversification resulted in a preference change. Mass media broadcasted the overseas affairs and their cultural contents, leaving our practices aside, combining which all in return accelerated the decline of Bangladeshi folklore practices; kite flying was one of them. The main reason behind the extinction of any course or tradition is the lesser interaction and interests of the affiliated

people. Kite flying is a social activity, the existence of which is renounced in the practices of hundreds of years from the histories of Asia and Europe [20]. After juxtaposing the observation of two Bangladeshi generations in the 1960s and 2000s, two completely different views and interests regarding kite flying evolved.

Infuriation of the cultural practice of kite flying with the current generation started just after the urbanization and a huge generation gap: separating the modern generation from their grandparent generation. The golden culture of kite flying is declining rapidly. Cultural societies must come forward to keep this tradition alive, and further study is required to identify feasible approaches for the national stakeholders to leap into action.

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