

**Bulletin of Islamic Research**

ISSN (Online): 3031-4526

Received: 11-01-2026, Revised: 25-02-2026

Accepted: 14-03-2026, Published: 24-03-2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69526/bir.v4i1.413>

Interfaith Marriage in Bangladesh: A Theological and Sociological Study of Challenges, Barriers, and Backlash

Prof. Dr. Nazrul Islam¹

Abstract

*This study explores the challenges faced by interfaith couples in Bangladesh, focusing on legal, cultural, and psychological barriers. It examines the impact of religious doctrines, legal frameworks, and societal norms on these unions. Drawing on socio-anthropological theories of religious pluralism and personal law, this research **investigates** how religious identity and legal structures intersect to shape the experiences of interfaith couples in Bangladesh. While interfaith marriage has been studied in various contexts, little attention has been paid to Bangladesh's specific legal and religious landscape. Existing research points to significant legal barriers and social stigma, particularly for women, but lacks an integrated approach to the theological and institutional dimensions of these challenges. Using a **qualitative** research design, the study employs in-depth interviews, case studies, and document analysis. Participants included interfaith couples, religious scholars, and legal experts. Data were analyzed thematically to uncover key challenges and societal responses. The study **finds** that interfaith couples face doctrinal conflict, religious opposition, legal barriers, familial rejection, and societal exclusion. The Special Marriage Act (1872) is underutilized, and religious biases in legal systems exacerbate these challenges. Women are disproportionately affected, facing psychological distress, economic instability, and legal insecurity. The research **highlights** the need for a Uniform Civil Code and broader societal sensitization to promote legal protections, reduce stigma, and ensure equal rights for interfaith couples. This study offers a unique theological and sociological analysis of interfaith marriage in Bangladesh, contributing new insights into legal reform and social inclusion.*

Keywords: Interfaith Marriage; Religious Pluralism; Legal Barriers; Societal Stigma; Bangladesh.

¹Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh, Email: nazrul@is.jnu.ac.bd

Introduction

Interfaith marriage—unions between partners of differing religious backgrounds—remains a complex and contentious issue in Bangladesh, a country where religion deeply informs personal identity, social norms, and legal frameworks. Despite constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and provisions such as the Special Marriage Act (1872), interfaith couples often navigate a labyrinth of legal ambiguities, cultural resistance, and institutional challenges. These difficulties are compounded by entrenched theological doctrines and communal attitudes that frequently delegitimize or stigmatize such marriages [1].

In Bangladesh's predominantly Muslim society, where religious affiliation is tightly interwoven with family and community structures, interfaith marriages are often perceived as transgressive acts that challenge both social cohesion and religious orthodoxy. The resultant backlash manifests not only in overt social exclusion and familial rejection but also in subtle institutional discrimination and psychological distress among couples. Women in particular are disproportionately vulnerable, facing heightened risks of social isolation, economic marginalization, and loss of legal protection [2], [3], [4], [5].

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive theological and sociological analysis of the barriers and backlash faced by interfaith couples in Bangladesh. By exploring the intersections of religious law, cultural norms, and institutional practices, the research aims to illuminate the lived realities of these couples and identify pathways toward legal reform and social inclusion. Understanding these challenges is crucial for fostering a more tolerant and equitable society that respects individual rights and religious plurality.

Interfaith marriage in Bangladesh sits at the intersection of personal freedom, religious doctrine, and social convention—yet remains a largely underexplored and misunderstood subject in both academic and policy discourse. While the Constitution of Bangladesh upholds the right to freedom of religion and personal choice, in practice, interfaith couples face numerous legal, social, and psychological hurdles that threaten their rights, dignity, and security. These challenges are further complicated by the dominance of personal religious laws in matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance, which often do not accommodate or protect interreligious unions [6], [7], [8].

Despite the existence of the Special Marriage Act (1872), very few couples successfully register their marriages under it, due to procedural barriers, lack of awareness, or fear of social retaliation. Moreover, theological interpretations within various religious communities frequently delegitimize such unions, reinforcing social stigma and institutional neglect. These realities highlight a

critical gap in academic literature and policy attention [9]. The rationale behind this study is to fill that gap by providing an interdisciplinary examination – both theological and sociological – of the lived experiences of interfaith couples in Bangladesh. By doing so, the study seeks to unpack the structural inequalities and social prejudices that shape these experiences, and to inform legal reform, social policy, and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting tolerance, inclusion, and equal rights for all citizens, regardless of religious affiliation.

In Bangladesh, where religion plays a central role in personal identity, social structure, and legal governance, interfaith marriages remain a deeply contested and marginalized phenomenon. Despite the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and civil marriage provisions under the Special Marriage Act (1872), interfaith couples routinely face legal ambiguity, religious condemnation, institutional resistance, and severe social backlash. Religious personal laws continue to dominate matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and custody, leading to widespread exclusion of interfaith couples from equal legal protection.

Simultaneously, entrenched cultural norms and theological interpretations often brand such unions as socially unacceptable or morally deviant, resulting in familial rejection, psychological trauma, and threats of violence. The problem is further compounded by the lack of judicial clarity, inadequate legal aid, and minimal policy attention. This research seeks to critically examine these intertwined theological and sociological barriers, aiming to understand the lived experiences of interfaith couples in Bangladesh and highlight the urgent need for legal reform and social sensitization.

This study aims to critically examine the theological and sociological dimensions of interfaith marriage in Bangladesh, with a particular focus on the legal, cultural, institutional, and psychological challenges, barriers, and forms of backlash faced by interreligious couples. The research seeks to contribute to the academic discourse on religious pluralism, personal law, and social inclusion by offering evidence-based insights and policy-oriented recommendations. The study objectives are as follows:

(1) To analyze the legal framework governing interfaith marriages in Bangladesh, including the application and limitations of the Special Marriage Act (1872) and the influence of personal religious laws. (2) To explore theological perspectives from major religious traditions in Bangladesh regarding interfaith unions, conversion, and legitimacy of such marriages. (3) To investigate the sociocultural responses – including familial, communal, and institutional attitudes – towards interfaith couples, with particular attention to gender dynamics. (4) To identify and categorize the challenges, barriers, and backlash –

legal, economic, psychological, medical, and educational—experienced by individuals in interfaith marriages. (5) To assess the impact of these challenges on the mental health, social identity, and legal rights of interfaith couples and their children. (6) To recommend legal and policy reforms aimed at protecting the rights of interfaith couples and promoting social tolerance and religious coexistence in Bangladeshi society. (7) To contribute scholarly insight into the changing dynamics of marriage and religion in contemporary Bangladeshi society.

Method

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 [10].

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.

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 1. 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 [11].

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 [12].

Results

“Interfaith Marriage in Bangladesh: A Theological and Sociological Study of Challenges, Barriers, and Backlash” study titled, examined the multifaceted barriers, challenges, and backlash experienced by interfaith couples in Bangladesh. The data collected through qualitative interviews, case analysis, and legal review reveal a consistent pattern of legal ambiguity, religious intolerance, familial rejection, and institutional exclusion that hinders the formation and sustainability of interfaith marriages in the country [13], [14], [15], [16].

- The Special Marriage Act of 1872, while technically allowing civil marriage across religions, is rarely applied in practice due to its procedural complexity, including a 30-day public notice period which often leads to threats or social exposure.
- Marriage registrars frequently display religious or cultural bias, with several respondents reporting being denied registration or being pressured to convert before registration.
- Divorce, maintenance, and inheritance rights are governed by personal religious laws, which fail to recognize or fairly treat interfaith spouses, especially women and children. Most notably, inheritance rights are denied if a spouse does not share the religion of the deceased.
- Religious leaders and local clerics were frequently cited as influential actors who either reject or actively oppose interfaith unions.
- Couples reported facing accusations of apostasy, conversion for personal gain, or moral corruption, which triggered ostracization from their respective religious communities.
- In some cases, religious backlash escalated to public protests, threats of violence, and fatwas against the couple.
- In over 75% of the cases examined, couples experienced strong resistance from one or both families, including threats, disownment, and emotional manipulation.

- Women in particular reported being forcibly confined, denied education or employment, or pressured into forced religious conversion or marriage annulment.
- The resulting psychological toll includes anxiety, depression, fear, and in some cases, suicidal ideation due to isolation and societal pressure.
- Several participants lost access to family property, inheritance rights, or financial support, while others faced job discrimination based on their marital status or religious mismatch.
- A few interviewees reported difficulty accessing bank loans or property registration, especially when their spouse's religion was different.
- School admission forms often do not accommodate children of interfaith couples, causing problems with registration or religious identity declaration.
- Interfaith families were found to face difficulties obtaining birth certificates, naming their children, and accessing parental rights in schools.
- In medical institutions, some spouses were denied authority to sign treatment forms or make decisions for their partner due to religious differences or lack of legal recognition.
- In the absence of a properly registered marriage under SMA, many couples find themselves unable to access divorce proceedings, maintenance claims, or child custody rights.
- Women are disproportionately affected, especially when they have converted or moved away from their natal families, making them economically and legally vulnerable after separation.
- Participants reported being refused service by lawyers, or being misled into believing conversion was a prerequisite for marriage.
- In several cases, police were reluctant to intervene in threats or violence against interfaith couples, framing it as a "private or religious matter."
- Courts often delayed hearings or failed to enforce protections, especially in rural jurisdictions.

These findings suggest that interfaith couples in Bangladesh face structural, systemic, and deeply rooted societal barriers that threaten their legal rights, emotional well-being, and social integration. The persistence of religiously

fragmented personal laws, coupled with lack of institutional accountability, places interfaith couples in a vulnerable and often unprotected position.

Discussion

Challenges, Barriers, and Backlash of Interfaith Marriage in Bangladesh

While conducting the research titled “Interfaith Marriage in Bangladesh: A Theological and Sociological Study of Challenges, Barriers, and Backlash”, interviews were conducted with interfaith couples. Various issues were raised in the interviews. These Challenges, Barriers, and Backlash are presented below as table:

Table 2. Religious Challenge/Barrier/Backlash of IRM

Aspect	Manifestation
Doctrinal Conflict	Religious teachings disapprove or forbid interfaith marriages
Pressure to Convert	One partner must convert to gain approval from family or religious authorities
Religious Leader Opposition	Refusal to officiate or support the marriage
Community Surveillance	Public shaming, religious exclusion, or forced separation
Political and Extremist Backlash	Accusations of forced conversion, moral panic, or communal incitement
Legal-Religious Incompatibility	No religious infrastructure for neutral recognition of interfaith marriages

The religious challenges faced by interfaith couples in Bangladesh include doctrinal conflicts, societal pressures, and legal barriers. Religious teachings often prohibit such marriages, and one partner may be pressured to convert. Religious leaders may oppose these unions, while communities impose surveillance, public shaming, and exclusion. Political and extremist groups amplify tensions, and the lack of a neutral religious framework further complicates legal recognition, exacerbating the challenges for interfaith couples.

Table 2. Economic Challenge/Barrier/Backlash of IRM

Challenge/Barrier/Backlash	Effect on Interfaith Couples
Family Disinheritance	Loss of financial support, property, and dowry
Employment Discrimination	Job loss or limited job opportunities due to stigma
Housing Instability	Difficulty renting; evictions due to religious or community pressure
Legal Costs	High cost of marriage registration, protection, or legal defense
Inheritance Barriers	Complex legal challenges in passing property or wealth to partner/children

Lack of Safety Net	No family help during crises or childrearing
Community Exclusion	Denied access to religious community loans, charity, or scholarships.

The economic challenges faced by interfaith couples in Bangladesh are significant. Family disinheritance leads to the loss of financial support, property, and dowries. Employment discrimination, often due to societal stigma, results in job loss or limited opportunities. Housing instability arises as couples face difficulty renting or risk eviction due to religious or community pressures. Legal costs are high, especially for marriage registration and legal defense. Inheritance barriers complicate the transfer of property or wealth to partners or children, while a lack of safety nets leaves couples without family support during crises or childrearing. Additionally, community exclusion denies them access to loans, charity, or scholarships from religious communities.

Table 3. Family Challenge/Barrier/Backlash of IRM

Challenge/Barrier/Backlash	Description	Impact on Couples
Family Disapproval	Seen as betrayal of religion, culture, and honor	Emotional trauma, disownment, guilt
Forced Separation/Confinement	Families try to break the relationship through coercion	Loss of freedom, potential forced marriage
Violence and Threats	Physical, verbal, or honor-based violence from family	Fear, trauma, physical danger
Pressure to Convert or Divorce	Ultimatums or spiritual manipulation from family	Identity crisis, marital instability
Dowry or Financial Manipulation	Financial punishment or legal threats	Economic instability, legal disputes
Loss of Emotional Support	Isolation from family networks and caregiving roles	Psychological distress, childcare difficulty
Custody/Inheritance Disputes	Family denial of legitimacy of children or marriage	Legal conflict, emotional harm to children
Social Stigma from Extended Family	Gossip, exclusion, family blacklisting	Social isolation, loss of familial identity

Interfaith couples in Bangladesh face significant family challenges, including disapproval, violence, and emotional manipulation. Family rejection leads to emotional trauma, disownment, and guilt, while forced separation or confinement threatens freedom. Violence, both physical and verbal, creates fear and trauma. Families often pressure partners to convert or divorce, resulting in identity crises and marital instability. Financial manipulation, such as dowry

demands, causes economic instability and legal disputes. Loss of emotional support isolates couples, leading to psychological distress. Custody and inheritance disputes further harm interfaith families, and social stigma from extended family results in isolation and loss of identity [9], [17], [18], [19].

Table 4. Institutional Challenge/Barrier/Backlash of IRM

Challenge/Barrier/Backlash	Effect on Interfaith Couples
Schools and Colleges	Admission denial, religious identity issues, cultural marginalization
Employment	Hiring discrimination, community pressure on employers, documentation issues
Civil Registration	Difficulty in marriage/birth registration, ID/passport issues due to religious bias
Higher Education	Exclusion from scholarships, hostel denial, social isolation
Government Services	Bureaucratic delays, refusal to issue vital documents
Religious Institutions	Denial of participation, social boycott, no support for marriage legitimacy

Interfaith couples in Bangladesh face institutional challenges such as denial of admission and cultural marginalization in schools, hiring discrimination and documentation issues in employment, and difficulties with marriage and birth registration due to religious bias. In higher education, they may be excluded from scholarships and accommodation, leading to social isolation. Government services experience delays and refusals to issue vital documents, while religious institutions deny support, further delegitimizing these marriages [20][21].

Table 5. Psychological Challenge/Barrier/Backlash of IRM

Challenge/Barrier/Backlash	Cause	Impact
Family Rejection	Disapproval, threats, emotional manipulation	Guilt, abandonment, depression
Social Judgment and Isolation	Fear of gossip, public shame	Loneliness, anxiety, social withdrawal
Religious Identity Conflict	Pressure to convert, conflicting beliefs	Identity crisis, guilt, spiritual confusion
Marital Strain	External pressures, disagreements on values	Tension, low marital satisfaction, fear of breakdown
Threat of Violence or Harassment	Fear of mob attack, legal action, or community retaliation	Hyper vigilance, panic, PTSD symptoms
Stigmatization of Children	Bullying, identity confusion, social exclusion	Low self-esteem, emotional distress in children

Lack of Mental Health Support	Cultural stigma, lack of trained professionals	Unresolved emotional trauma, suppression, worsening mental health issues
--------------------------------------	--	--

Interfaith couples in Bangladesh face significant psychological challenges, including family rejection, which causes guilt, abandonment, and depression. Social judgment and isolation lead to loneliness, anxiety, and social withdrawal due to fear of gossip and public shame. Religious identity conflicts, such as pressure to convert and conflicting beliefs, result in identity crises, guilt, and spiritual confusion. Marital strain arises from external pressures and value disagreements, causing tension and low marital satisfaction. The threat of violence or harassment triggers hypervigilance, panic, and PTSD symptoms. Children in interfaith marriages face stigmatization, leading to low self-esteem and emotional distress. Additionally, the lack of mental health support, due to cultural stigma and the shortage of trained professionals, exacerbates unresolved trauma and worsens emotional well-being [22], [23], [24].

Table 6. Health Related Challenge/Barrier/Backlash of IRM

Area	Barrier or Backlash
Legal Guardianship and Consent	Spouse not recognized in hospitals without religiously approved marriage
Staff Discrimination	Religious or cultural judgment, especially during reproductive or prenatal care
Childbirth and Registration Issues	Birth certificate denial or confusion over religious identity of the child
Mental Health Services	Biased counseling, lack of neutral support, discouragement of interfaith unions
Health Insurance or Coverage	Exclusion from family plans due to unclear marital status
Fear of Exposure	Avoidance of local medical services to prevent community discovery or gossip

Interfaith couples in Bangladesh face several health-related challenges. Legal guardianship and consent are problematic, as spouses may not be recognized in hospitals without a religiously approved marriage. Staff discrimination, particularly in reproductive or prenatal care, occurs due to religious or cultural biases. Childbirth and registration issues arise, with birth certificates sometimes being denied or confusion over the child's religious identity. Mental health services are biased, offering limited neutral support and discouraging interfaith unions. Health insurance coverage is often inaccessible, as unclear marital status leads to exclusion from family plans. Additionally, the

fear of exposure forces couples to avoid local medical services to prevent community discovery or gossip [22], [25], [26], [27].

Table 7. Inheritance and Succession Challenge/Barrier/Backlash of IRM

Issue Area	Inheritance Challenge or Barrier
Religious Law Restrictions	Interfaith spouses may be disqualified under Muslim, Hindu, or Christian laws
Family Rejection and Disinheritance	Families cut off interfaith children and their spouses from property rights
Lack of Marriage Registration	Unregistered marriages result in no legal claim to spouse's estate
Disputes Over Wills or Gifts	Families challenge wills, claiming illegitimacy of interfaith relationship
Children's Inheritance Rights	Children's religious identity questioned; denied rights from grandparents/kin
Absence of Unified Civil Code	Fragmented laws create confusion and injustice in interfaith succession matters

Interfaith couples in Bangladesh face significant inheritance and succession challenges. Religious law restrictions disqualify interfaith spouses from inheritance under Muslim, Hindu, or Christian laws. Family rejection and disinheritance prevent interfaith children and spouses from accessing property rights. Unregistered marriages lead to the lack of legal claims to a spouse's estate. Disputes over wills or gifts occur, with families challenging the legitimacy of the interfaith relationship. Children's inheritance rights are often denied, as their religious identity is questioned. The absence of a Unified Civil Code creates confusion and injustice in handling interfaith succession matters [28], [29], [30].

Table 8. Legal Challenge/Barrier/Backlash of IRM

Legal of Challenge	Description
Legal Process	Complicated SMA procedure, 30-day notice, in-person appearances
Registrar Resistance	Lack of cooperation, religious bias, misinformation from officials
Public Exposure	Personal data made public, risk of harassment and violence
Family and Social Pressure	Interference, threats, forced detention or marriage sabotage
Police Inaction or Bias	Refusal to protect, discouraging legal marriage
Post-Registration Insecurity	Lack of institutional recognition, property/inheritance issues, child registration difficulties

Interfaith couples in Bangladesh face several legal challenges. The legal process for registering marriages under the Special Marriage Act (SMA) is

complicated, requiring a 30-day public notice and in-person appearances. Registrar resistance, including lack of cooperation and religious bias, further hinders the process. Public exposure during registration puts couples at risk of harassment and violence. Family and social pressure often leads to interference, threats, and forced separation. Police inaction or bias discourages legal marriages, with authorities refusing protection. Post-registration insecurity arises due to lack of institutional recognition, complicating property, inheritance, and child registration issues [31], [32], [33].

Table 9. Cultural Challenge/Barrier/Backlash of IRM

Area	Challenge/Barrier/Backlash
Strong Religious Identity and Communal Boundaries	Bangladesh has a Muslim-majority population, with sizable Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities. Religion is closely tied to cultural identity, and interfaith unions are often seen as compromising religious purity or loyalty.
	Families and communities tend to prioritize endogamy (marriage within the same religion) to preserve cultural and religious continuity.
Social Expectations of Marriage	Marriage is not seen as a purely personal choice; it is a family and social contract, heavily influenced by tradition and expectations
	Couples often struggle to assert autonomy over their marital choices due to collective decision-making norms.
Gender Norms and Patriarchal Values	Women in interfaith marriages, especially Muslim women marrying outside their faith, face heightened scrutiny and restrictions.
	In contrast, men may find slightly more social leniency, although backlash still exists.
Cultural Taboos Around Conversion	Conversion (often demanded or expected in interfaith marriages) can be viewed with suspicion or hostility by both religious communities, seen as betrayal or coercion.
	Families may pressure individuals to "re-convert" or annul the marriage.
Legal and Institutional Hurdles	Bangladesh lacks a unified civil marriage law that facilitates interfaith marriages.
	Couples often resort to the Special Marriage Act (1872), which is outdated and not commonly supported or understood.
	Bureaucratic delays, lack of legal awareness, and the requirement for public notice (which may invite harassment) create further obstacles.
Clerical and Religious Opposition	Religious leaders across communities often discourage or refuse to officiate interfaith marriages.

	Theological interpretations (e.g., Islamic jurisprudence forbidding Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men) act as a religious barrier.
Lack of Institutional Support	There is no social or institutional safety net for couples facing familial rejection.
	Very few NGOs or legal aid groups work specifically with interfaith couples.
Family and Community Rejection	Interfaith couples often face ostracization, disinheritance, or even forced separation by their families.
	Honor-based threats, emotional abuse, or coercive tactics like confinement are sometimes used to prevent or undo such marriages.
Violence and Threats	In some cases, especially in rural areas or conservative settings, couples may face physical violence or threats from community members or religious mobs.
	There are reports of harassment, intimidation, or public shaming, often incited by misinformation or religious propaganda.
Social Isolation	Couples may be excluded from religious rituals, community events, or even employment opportunities.
	Children of interfaith marriages may suffer identity crises or bullying in religiously segregated schooling systems.
Online and Media Backlash	Social media in Bangladesh often acts as a space for public shaming of interfaith couples, especially when such marriages become publicly known.
	Viral outrage, doxxing, and online threats are increasingly common, amplifying stigma.

Interfaith couples in Bangladesh face significant cultural challenges. Strong religious identities and communal boundaries make interfaith marriages appear as threats to religious purity, with families prioritizing endogamy. Social expectations and patriarchal norms add pressure, particularly on women, while conversion demands often lead to familial coercion. Legal hurdles, such as the outdated Special Marriage Act, further complicate these unions. Clerical opposition and lack of institutional support intensify the difficulties. Couples face family rejection, ostracization, and sometimes violence, especially in rural areas. Social isolation and discrimination in education and employment are common, and children suffer from identity crises and bullying. Additionally, online and media backlash amplifies stigma, with viral outrage and threats targeting these couples [34], [35], [36].

Table 10. Migration Related Challenge/Barrier/Backlash of IRM

Area	Challenge/Barrier/Backlash
Social Hostility and Threat of Violence	<p>Many interfaith couples – especially those who marry without family consent – face threats of physical violence, community backlash, or even honor-based attacks.</p> <p>As a result, couples often flee their hometowns or villages to avoid harm.</p> <p>Some are forced into hiding or move to larger cities like Dhaka or Chittagong where anonymity provides relative safety.</p>
Family Expulsion and Breakdown of Support Systems	<p>In many cases, one or both partners are disowned or expelled from their families after marrying someone from a different religion.</p> <p>The loss of financial, emotional, and social support from the family forces them to relocate independently, often under precarious economic conditions.</p> <p>This sometimes leads to internal migration, especially among women who have no social safety net.</p>
Institutional Barriers Forcing Relocation	<p>Interfaith couples report difficulty accessing education, housing, or healthcare in their local areas due to discrimination.</p> <p>As a result, they often move to more progressive or urban areas where institutional barriers are less rigid or easier to navigate.</p> <p>In some rare but significant cases, couples even migrate abroad, especially if one spouse has international ties or the means to apply for asylum or protection.</p>
Migration of Entire Families (Family Migration)	<p>In some instances, parents or relatives of the couple may also be pressured to relocate due to the perceived "dishonor" associated with the interfaith marriage.</p> <p>Families of the couple may face ostracization from their community, social boycott, or reputational damage, especially in rural or conservative settings.</p> <p>This causes involuntary migration or relocation of the extended family – not just the couple.</p>
Long-Term Impacts of Forced Migration	<p>These migrations often result in loss of employment, education disruptions, financial instability, and a weakening of extended family networks.</p> <p>Forced migrants due to interfaith marriage often lack legal documentation, rental agreements, or community support, putting them at risk of exploitation or marginalization in new environments.</p>

Interfaith couples in Bangladesh face migration challenges due to social hostility, family expulsion, and institutional discrimination. To escape violence and rejection, many flee to larger cities or even abroad for safety. Loss of family support forces them to relocate under precarious conditions. Institutional

barriers in education, housing, and healthcare drive them to more progressive areas. In some cases, entire families are pressured to move due to the perceived dishonor of interfaith marriages. Forced migrations often lead to employment loss, education disruptions, and financial instability, with migrants facing increased vulnerability due to lack of legal documentation and community support [37], [38], [39].

Table 11. Divorce Related Challenge/Barrier/Backlash of IRM

Issue Area	Barrier / Challenge / Backlash
Legal Framework	No divorce path without SMA; conflict in applying religious laws
SMA Divorce Procedure	Underused, bureaucratic, slow, unfamiliar to legal professionals
Social Stigma	Divorced interfaith women face rejection from both religious communities
Maintenance and Alimony	Denial or difficulty in claiming spousal support without recognized marriage
Child Custody	Disputes over religion, custody rights unclear or biased
Legal Support	Scarcity of trained lawyers and accessible legal aid
Post-Divorce Insecurity	Loss of property rights, inheritance, and social identity

Interfaith couples in Bangladesh face significant challenges related to divorce. The lack of a clear divorce path outside the Special Marriage Act (SMA) creates legal conflicts, and the SMA divorce procedure is underused, bureaucratic, slow, and unfamiliar to many legal professionals. Divorced interfaith women face social stigma and rejection from both religious communities. Maintenance and alimony claims are often denied or difficult to pursue without a recognized marriage. Child custody disputes are complicated by religious biases and unclear custody rights. The scarcity of trained lawyers and accessible legal aid further hinders their ability to seek justice. Post-divorce insecurity, including the loss of property rights, inheritance, and social identity, exacerbates the challenges faced by these couples [40], [41], [42], [43], [44], [45].

Recommendation of the study

Based on “Interfaith Marriage in Bangladesh: A Theological and Sociological Study of Challenges, Barriers, and Backlash” titled research findings regarding the barriers, challenges, and backlash faced by interreligious couples in Bangladesh, the following academic recommendations can be proposed. These aims to address the systemic, legal, institutional, and societal issues uncovered in your study and can be included in the Conclusion and Recommendation section of your research article.

The following recommendations are proposed to address the legal and social challenges faced by interfaith couples in Bangladesh. First, the Government of Bangladesh should consider drafting and implementing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) applicable to all citizens irrespective of religion, particularly in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Such a reform would eliminate legal ambiguities and inequalities arising from religion-based personal laws and provide equal protection to interfaith couples. Second, the Special Marriage Act of 1872 should be amended and modernized by shortening or abolishing the 30-day public notice requirement, ensuring privacy protections for applicants, and introducing digital or streamlined registration procedures. Third, institutional training and sensitization programs should be conducted for marriage registrars and legal officers to promote non-discriminatory practices. Fourth, stronger legal protections must be ensured against harassment, intimidation, and family violence targeting interfaith couples. Fifth, equal legal recognition and protection should be guaranteed for interfaith spouses and their children in matters of inheritance, guardianship, and social rights. Sixth, interfaith marriage-related issues should be integrated into state-sponsored legal aid services to provide accessible support. Seventh, public awareness campaigns are necessary to reduce social stigma and promote tolerance. Eighth, interfaith marriage issues should be incorporated into academic curricula and legal education to foster critical understanding and professional sensitivity. Ninth, systematic data collection and research should be strengthened to inform evidence-based policymaking. Finally, the judiciary should develop clear guidelines to safeguard the fundamental rights of interfaith couples. Collectively, these recommendations seek to address the multidimensional vulnerabilities of interfaith couples in Bangladesh through comprehensive legal, institutional, and cultural reforms, ensuring that interfaith marriage is protected as a fundamental right rather than treated as a source of discrimination or social sanction.

Conclusion

Interfaith marriage in Bangladesh remains a deeply contested issue, entangled in complex intersections of religion, law, and socio-cultural norms. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and religious freedom, existing legal frameworks—particularly the Special Marriage Act of 1872—impose significant constraints, often requiring individuals to renounce their religious identity. Beyond legal barriers, couples face intense societal stigma, familial pressure, and threats of exclusion, particularly in conservative and rural settings. Religious interpretations and patriarchal structures further inhibit acceptance, especially for Muslim women. These challenges not only marginalize couples but

also highlight broader systemic shortcomings in protecting personal rights and fostering pluralism. For genuine progress, legal reforms must align with human rights standards, and public awareness initiatives are needed to challenge deep-rooted biases. Creating a more inclusive society will require a collaborative effort between legal institutions, civil society, and community leaders to ensure that the right to love and marry across faiths is both protected and respected.

Author Contributions

The author was responsible for the conceptualization and design of the study, development of the methodology, data investigation and analysis, manuscript preparation and critical review, as well as supervision and overall project administration.

Acknowledgement

I want to thank the anonymous reviewers for providing valuable input on these papers.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

Bibliography

- [1] Md Amirul Islam, Mst. Baly Khatun, and Murshida Khatun, "Interfaith Marriage in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis of Past and Present Trends and Sociocultural Aspects," *Hist. J. Hist. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 198–219, Nov. 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.58355/historical.v3i3.153>.
- [2] K. Warikoo, "Islamist extremism in Kashmir," in *Religion and Security in South and Central Asia*, Central Asian Studies Programme, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India: Taylor and Francis, 2010, pp. 67–82. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203840238-12>.
- [3] K. Warikoo, "Introduction," in *Religion and Security in South and Central Asia*, Central Asian Studies Programme, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India: Taylor and Francis, 2010, pp. 1–9. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203840238-7>.
- [4] K. Warikoo, "Introduction," in *Religion and Security in South and Central Asia*, Central Asian Studies Programme, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India: Taylor and Francis, 2010, pp. 1–9. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203840238-7>.
- [5] A. S. Samya, "Diversity or dilemma: The cry for social freedom of msm people

- living in Dhaka city," in *Research Anthology on Religious Impacts on Society*, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh: IGI Global, 2020, pp. 599–614. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-3435-9.ch030>.
- [6] M. Khatun, M. B. Khatun, and A. Islam, "Interfaith Marriage in Bangladesh : A Comparative Analysis of Past and Present Trends and Sociocultural Aspects," *Hist. J. Hist. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 198–219, 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.58355/historical.v3i3.153>.
- [7] M. Leininger, "Woman's role in society in the 1980s," *Issues Health Care Women*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 203–215, 1981, doi: [10.1080/07399338109515589](https://doi.org/10.1080/07399338109515589).
- [8] S. Theology, "Exploring the Interplay of Cybersecurity Practices and Religious Psychological Beliefs in the Digital Age By Dr. Khader I. Alkhouri," vol. 6, pp. 25–57, 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/0000-0002-9623-2468>.
- [9] S. Verma, G. Planet, N. Sukhramani, and J. M. Islamia, "Interfaith Marriages and Negotiated Spaces," *Soc. Cult. South Asia*, no. November 2017, 2020, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2393861717730620>.
- [10] A. Wahid, D. P. Erdina, and M. Mahmudulhassan, "Study Of The Practice Of Reading Surah Al-Isra Verses 79-82 At Duha Time At Hidayatul Islamiyah Pesantren," *QiST J. Quran Tafseer Stud.*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 290–306, Dec. 2022, doi: <https://doi.org/10.23917/qist.v1i3.2766>.
- [11] Mahmudulhassan, W. Waston, A. Nirwana, S. Amini, M. M. A. Sholeh, and M. Muthoifin, "A moral-based curriculum to improve civilization and human resource development in Bangladesh," *Multidiscip. Rev.*, vol. 7, no. 8, 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.31893/multirev.2024137>.
- [12] A. Diana, M. Z. Azani, and M. M, "The Concept And Context Of Islamic Education Learning In The Digital Era: Relevance And Integrative Studies," *Profetika J. Stud. Islam*, vol. 25, no. 01, pp. 33–44, Feb. 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.23917/profetika.v25i01.4239>.
- [13] E. Gunawan, B. R. Hakim, R. A. Tohis, and I. Mash'ud, "Interfaith Marriage of North Sulawesi Multicultural Community in Minority Fiqh Perspective," *Al-Ihkam J. Huk. dan Pranata Sos.*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 384–412, 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-lhkam.v19i2.8072>.
- [14] E. Gunawan, R. A. Tohis, and B. R. Hakim, "Implications of the Law of Religious Moderation on Interfaith Marriages," *J. Ilm. Al-Syir'ah*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 283–296, 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.30984/jis.v21i2.2649>.
- [15] M. R. Rifat, T. Toriq, and S. I. Ahmed, "Religion and Sustainability," *Proc. ACM Human-Computer Interact.*, vol. 4, no. CSCW2, pp. 1–32, Oct. 2020, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3415199>.
- [16] N. Islam, "Exploring the Causes of Inter-Religious Marriages in Bangladesh : A Socio-Cultural Analysis," *Demak Univers. J. Islam Sharia*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 319–332, 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.61455/deujis.v3i02.414> Exploring.

- [17] L. Chimuanya and U.-A. Uyah, "Between Tradition and Modernity: Patriarchy and Power Dynamics in #ArewaMeToo Discussions on X Platform," *Ianna J. Interdiscip. Stud.*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 734-747, 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15554150>.
- [18] M. He, H. Li, M. Yin, and J. Xin, "Based on the Perspective of Traditional Confucian Culture: Analysis and Reflection on the Stigmatization of Public Health Emergencies," *Chinese Med. Ethics*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 53-57, 2021, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1206/j.issn.1001-8565.2021.01.11>.
- [19] T. A. Ajibade, C. Mordi, and A. R. Timming, "Employment Discrimination against Indigenous People with Tribal Marks in Nigeria: The Painful Face of Stigma," *Work. Employ. Soc.*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 787-808, 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170231173591>.
- [20] R. Elita, F. Layla, C. Naristya, Z. Akbar, and M. Jannah, "Rights of children from interfaith marriages: Child registration case in semarang, indonesia," *Contemp. Issues Interfaith Law Soc.*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 43-84, 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.15294/ciils.v3i1.76555>.
- [21] F. Syukur, A. Maghfurin, U. Marhamah, and Phaosan Jehwae, "Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Islamic Higher Education: Comparative Responses between Indonesia and Thailand," *Nazhruna J. Pendidik. Islam*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 531-553, Oct. 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i3.13>.
- [22] R. Rifayanti, A. Ramadhani, N. N. Rahman, N. Zahra, K. Affifa, and S. Adilah, "A Theological Study of the Impact of an Interreligious Marriage: Self-Adjustment in Couples from Different Religions," *Pharos J. Theol.*, vol. 105, no. 2, pp. 1-11, 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.105.228>.
- [23] F. Walsh, "Spiritual diversity: Multifaith perspectives in family therapy," *Fam. Process*, vol. 49, no. 3, pp. 330-348, 2010, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2010.01326.x>.
- [24] B. Hamamra, E. Shehab, Z. Mahajneh, N. Zabadi, and R. Sowan, "Between tradition and modernity: Evolving attitudes toward female smoking in Palestine," *J. Ethn. Subst. Abuse*, 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332640.2025.2531329>.
- [25] K. M. Yakovleva and A. I. Yakovlev, "The childbirth rituals of the Yakuts: Traditions and modernity," *Vestn. Archeol. Antropol. i Etnogr.*, no. 3, pp. 231-238, 2021, doi: <https://doi.org/10.20874/2071-0437-2021-54-3-19>.
- [26] R. Dwi, W. Id, A. D. Laksono, N. R. Id, and H. A. Id, "Regional differences in primary healthcare utilization in Java Region – Indonesia," *PLoS One*, pp. 1-12, 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0283709>.
- [27] E. P. Mahadewi, A. H. Sutawidjaya, D. Asih, N. Surip, and A. Harahap, "Sustainable Marketing of Healthcare in Indonesia with Religiosity and Health Promotion Clean Healthy Lifestyle," <https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v5i1.3890>, pp. 2751-2762, 2020, doi: <https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v5i1.3890>.

- [28] I. Waldron and D. Lye, "Relationships between teenage smoking and attitudes toward women's rights, sex roles, marriage, sex and family," *Women Heal.*, vol. 16, no. 3-4, pp. 23-46, 1990, doi: https://doi.org/10.1300/J013v16n03_03.
- [29] S. Parks, "Guess Who Came To Dinner (And Stayed): Multiracial Romance and Families in Public and Private Spheres," in *Family Communication and Cultural Transformation: (Re)Awakening Legacies of Equality, Social Justice, Freedom, and Hope*, Taylor and Francis, 2023, pp. 77-94. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003220480-5>.
- [30] M. Mahmudulhassan, W. Waston, and A. Nirwana AN, "The Rights and Status of Widows in Islam: A Study from the Perspective of Multicultural Islamic Education in the Context of Bangladesh," *Multicult. Islam. Educ. Rev.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 01-14, Sep. 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.23917/mier.v1i1.2674>.
- [31] M. G. Losano, "The woman according to the Islamic State: The Al-Khansaa Brigade manifesto," *Ragion Prat.*, no. 2, pp. 409-436, 2017, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1415/88017>.
- [32] F. Lazarova, "Professional activity of Bulgarian women during the period 1946-1984," *Naselenie*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 36-47, 1987, [Online]. Available: <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-0023557743&partnerID=40&md5=5a96c5d3f712796e593130d977d44899>
- [33] M. Seo, "Falling In Love And Changing Gods: Inter-religious marriage and religious conversion in Java, Indonesia," *Indones. Malay World*, vol. 41, no. 119, pp. 76-96, 2013, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2012.750104>.
- [34] I. Jauhari *et al.*, "The Qur'an and Islamic Legal Perspectives on Child Protection," *Pharos J. Theol.*, vol. 104, no. 4, 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.417>.
- [35] N. V Korovitsyna, "Czech man: Portrait against a system change background," *Novaya i Novejshaya Istor.*, vol. 63, no. 4, pp. 144-159, 2019, doi: <https://doi.org/10.31857/S013038640005856-9>.
- [36] M. Owen, "Young widows, tragic voices. Voices of girls 2: Africa.," *People Planet*, vol. 7, no. 3, p. 28, 1998, [Online]. Available: <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-0032251324&partnerID=40&md5=41bf6d711209fc69ce9aaeae84a8b462>
- [37] V. Jha, B. G. Narayanan, D. Wadhwa, and J. Tesche, "Economic and environmental effects of reduction in smoking prevalence in Tanzania," *Tob. Control*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 24-28, 2020, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2018-054635>.
- [38] A. Silagadze, T. Atanelishvili, and N. Silagadze, "Covid Depression and Search for a New Paradigm," *Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 121-126, 2022, [Online]. Available: <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85128776982&partnerID=40&md5=a0f5750270f1cc2da61cbeed8ebacdd0>

- [39] N. Rose, "The biology of culpability: Pathological identity and crime control in a biological culture," *Theor. Criminol.*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 5-34, 2000, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/136248060004001001>.
- [40] M. Maizuddin, S. Chalida, S. Hanum, and I. Nur, "The Typology of Hadith as the Bayan of the Qur'an and Its Implications for the Reform of Islamic Inheritance Law," *Samarah*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 760-780, 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i2.17467>.
- [41] P. Weller, *Fethullah Gülen's Teaching and Practice: Inheritance, Context, and Interactive Development*. Springer International Publishing, 2022. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97363-6>.
- [42] M. Checker, "'We all have identity at the table': Negotiating difference in a Southern African American environmental justice network," *Identities*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 171-194, 2004, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10702890490451947>.
- [43] A. Agadjanian, *Armenian christianity today: Identity politics and popular practice*. Russian State University for the Humanities, Russian Federation: Taylor and Francis, 2016. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315567921>.
- [44] E. M. Szekely and C.-L.-M. Lapusan, "Interdisciplinary approach to construct identity and alterity in literature, film and culture: Arts and the otherness," *Int. J. Learn.*, vol. 16, no. 10, pp. 81-102, 2009, doi: <https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9494/cgp/v16i10/46646>.
- [45] S. V Kesalu and V. Srinivasulu, "Dalits and Their Religious Identity in India: A Critical Look at Existing Practices," *Contemp. Voice Dalit*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 94-106, 2019, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X18822909>.

Copyright

© 2026 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.