

Changing Nature of Culture and Tradition: Exploring the Celebration of the Festival of Eid Amongst Upper-Middle-Class Muslims, in Metropolitan Cities

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Abstract:

This study explores how Eid al-Fitr celebrations among upper-middle-class Muslims in metropolitan cities are evolving under the influences of affluence, globalization, and technology. Through surveys and interviews with 30 participants, it examines the impact of socioeconomic status on gift-giving, the integration of global trends into traditional practices, and generational perspectives on communal feasts. Data reveals that while social media and connectivity have introduced new aesthetic and social elements, affluence magnifies the scale and hospitality of the celebrations. Despite these changes, participants largely emphasize the importance of preserving tradition. These findings underscore Eid al-Fitr as a dynamic expression of cultural identity where tradition and modernity converge, highlighting the adaptability of urban Muslim communities.

Purpose: The aim of this study is to investigate the evolution of Eid al-Fitr celebrations among upper-middle-class Muslims residing in metropolitan areas. The focus is on how tradition, affluence, and globalization intersect in these celebrations. The study seeks to comprehend the sociocultural changes within this community and to examine the impact of technological advancements and shifting generational perspectives on the preservation and adaptation of traditional practices. By analyzing these dynamics, the study intends to contribute to a broader understanding of how cultural identity is negotiated and maintained in an increasingly globalized and urbanized context.

Scope: This study focuses on upper-middle-class Muslims living in metropolitan areas and examines how they celebrate Eid al-Fitr, exploring the relationship between tradition and modernity. The research covers various aspects including the influence of socioeconomic status on celebratory practices, the role of technology and social media in changing communal gatherings, and the impact of globalization on cultural customs such as gift-giving and communal feasting. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews, with a focus on capturing diverse generational perspectives within the community. The findings offer insights into the broader sociological implications of urbanization and affluence on cultural practices, providing a nuanced perspective on the evolving nature of Eid celebrations.



INTRODUCTION:

The celebration of festivals is a fundamental aspect of human culture, reflecting the shared values, beliefs, and traditions that bind communities together. These festive occasions serve as pivotal moments, manifesting the cultural identity of a group and often undergoing transformations as societies evolve. This research paper delves into the profound transformations in culture and tradition through the lens of the celebration of the festival of Eid among upper-middle-class Muslims. To understand the dynamics at play, it is essential to elucidate the central concepts underpinning this study: festival, culture, tradition, Eid, and the upper-middle-class as a social stratum.

The term 'festival' denotes a culturally significant event marked by communal gatherings, ritualistic practices, and festive activities. Festivals are central to the fabric of culture, they are the vibrant manifestations of collective celebration, reflection, and communal identity. These celebratory occasions often display the intricate interplay between culture and tradition, where cultural practices are woven into the fabric of traditional rituals. The dynamics of culture and tradition are especially visible during religious celebrations, such as Eid.

Culture represents the totality of a group's shared knowledge, practices, beliefs, and values, transmitted from one generation to the next. Culture forms the basis of social norms and guides behaviours and expectations within a society. Traditions, on the other hand, refer to the specific customs and practices that

have been passed down through generations, playing a critical role in defining a group's identity. Culture and tradition are inextricably linked, as tradition often represents the tangible expression of cultural values. India has the largest population in the world (140 crore). Though most of its inhabitants are Hindus (1.094 billion which is 78.9%)¹, the 19.75 to 20 crore (14.22%–14.28%)² Muslims here celebrate two major religious festivals a year.

Eid, in the context of this study, is a significant Islamic festival with deep cultural and religious importance. It is a time when Muslims come together to celebrate their faith and heritage, demonstrating the fusion of culture and tradition in religious observance. Eid has deep sociocultural and religious roots that trace back to the 7th century CE in the Arabian Peninsula. The festival finds its origins in the Quranic command to celebrate Eid al-Fitr (Festival of Breaking the Fast) after Ramadan, the holy month of fasting. The celebration is characterised by communal prayers, feasting, acts of charity, and the exchange of gifts, which have been instrumental in uniting Muslim communities globally, fostering a shared cultural and religious identity. Over time, Eid has adapted to varying sociocultural contexts, reflecting the changing nature of culture and tradition in Muslim societies.

Within the vibrant expanse of a metropolitan, the beating heart of urban dynamism, these cultural elements undergo a metamorphosis, influenced by the relentless pulse of sociocultural changes and evolution. As societies evolve, so does the phenomenon of cultural diffusion, where traditions intermingle, creating a kaleidoscope of diverse expressions. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the celebration of festivals, where the gravitational pull of global influences converges with local practices, reshaping the contours of communal revelry. Amidst these transformative currents, the role of affluence emerges as a potent force, sculpting the grandeur and scale of festivities within metropolitan realms. Affluence transforms the canvas of tradition, fostering not only the preservation of cultural heritage but also the innovation and adaptation essential for cultural vitality in the ever-evolving urban landscapes. While exploring tradition, metropolitan dynamics, sociocultural evolution, and affluence, this research embarks on a journey to unravel the complex interplay that shapes the celebration of festivals, transcending the boundaries of time and tradition.

ACADEMIC LITERATURE REVIEWED:

1. “A PAKISTANI EID” by Syed Ad'lan Raza
https://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1310&context=core_reader

This essay on a Pakistani Eid provides valuable insights for the project on the changing nature of culture and tradition among upper-middle-class Muslims in metropolitan cities. Firstly, it emphasises the dual nature of Eid, integrating both religious and social dimensions. The described rituals, from morning prayers to communal parties and traditional visits, reflect a multifaceted celebration. The influence of Westernization, particularly in the second part of the day, underscores the evolving cultural dynamics within the community. The essay also highlights the role of affluence in shaping celebrations, evident in organised community parties and the exchange of monetary gifts. Furthermore, the contest among children to collect "Eidy" exemplifies the intersection of tradition, social relationships, and contemporary practices. Overall, the essay serves as a rich literature review, offering nuanced perspectives on the multifaceted celebration of Eid in Pakistan, providing a foundation for understanding cultural shifts within the upper-middle-class

Muslim community in metropolitan settings.

2. Husain, Waqar & Zahoor, Kiren & Ijaz, Farrukh. (2021). THE LEVELS OF JOY IN MUSLIMS' CELEBRATIONS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN EID AND WEDDINGS. EI-HARAKAH (TERAKREDITASI). 23. 219-237. 10.18860/eh.v23i2.14084.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357577415_THE_LEVELS_OF_JOY_IN_MUSLIMS'_CELEBRATIONS_A_COMPARISON_BETWEEN_EID_AND_WEDDINGS

Based on the research paper "The Levels of Joy in Muslims' Celebrations: A Comparison between Eid and Weddings," there are several key points to consider while exploring the celebration of the festival of Eid amongst upper-middle-class Muslims in metropolitan cities. The study involved 387 Pakistani Muslims, including men and women, and found that Pakistani Muslims enjoy their festivals at a very low degree, and the level of joy for Pakistanis during different festivals could not exceed 31 percent. Men had significantly higher levels of joy on Eid-Ul-Fitr and Eid-Ul-Adha as compared to women. Women had significantly higher levels of joy on close-relative's wedding as compared to men. Unmarried had significantly higher levels of joy at a friend's wedding as compared to married. Therefore, while exploring the celebration of the festival of Eid amongst upper-middle-class Muslims in metropolitan cities, it is essential to consider the levels of joy and the factors that influence them. Additionally, it is important to consider the social aspects, cultural traditions, impact of wealth, and influence of modernization on the celebration of Eid amongst upper-middle-class Muslims in metropolitan cities.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

1. To understand how the celebration of Eid has evolved in the last 40 years.
2. To understand how globalisation and technology have influenced the celebration.
3. To understand how different generations within Muslim communities perceive the act of gift-giving and communal feast.
4. To examine how the intersections of tradition and socioeconomic status affect the culture of gift-giving and communal feasts.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

1. In what ways do traditional practices intersect with socioeconomic status in shaping the culture of gift-giving and communal feasts?
2. How have global changes and technology impacted how upper-middle-class Muslims celebrate Eid ul Fitr?

METHODOLOGY

Participants: The study involves 30 conveniently selected participants, including 9 men and 21 women from Kolkata, Ranchi and Delhi. The age of the participants ranged between 18 to 70 years. All the participants were upper-middle-class Muslims and educated enough to respond to the study's questionnaire, which was in the English language.

The Instrument: A specific questionnaire in English was developed for the study. It asked the respondents about their observations of the modernisation of festive practices, cultural globalisation and generational

shift. The respondents were asked the following questions via an online questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire also required some demographic information from the participants (namely gender and age)

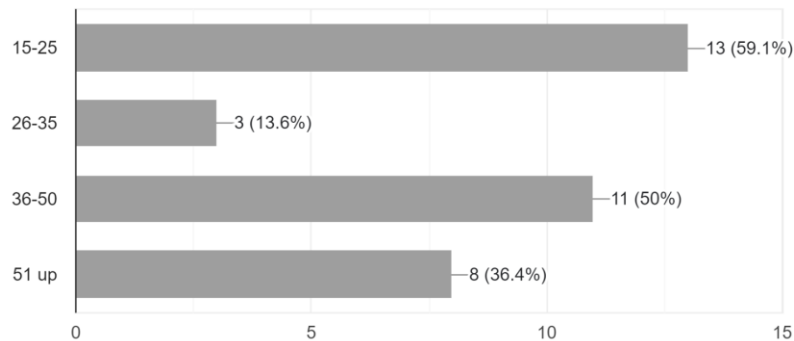
Procedure: I approached the study participants individually while visiting their residences and others over phone calls. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent to participate in the study was appropriately taken. Furthermore, they were assured of the confidentiality of the data and were thanked for their participation. Out of a total of 32 participants, most (30) were sent a Google Forms questionnaire while a few (2) were interviewed.

Link to Google Form: <https://forms.gle/Cgq47su5mSU4DLQE7>

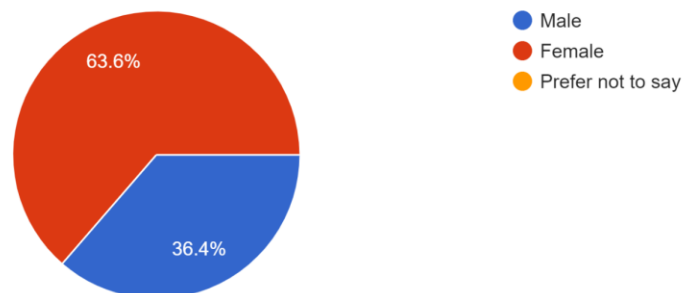
FINDINGS/ANALYSIS:

Demographic information: From the data obtained from the questionnaire, it can be understood that a majority of the respondents are the ‘youth’³ or young adults followed by the middle age group, late middle age and then the ‘older millennials’⁴. The respondents were mainly female and more resided in Delhi as compared to Kolkata.

AGE
22 responses

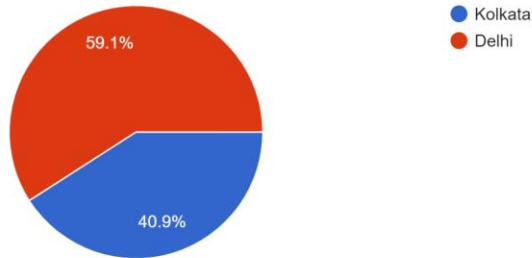


GENDER
22 responses



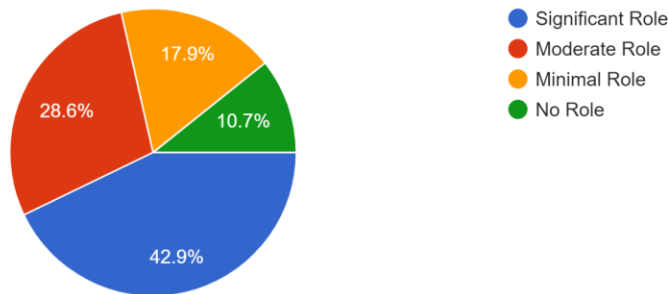
Metropolitan City of Residence

22 responses



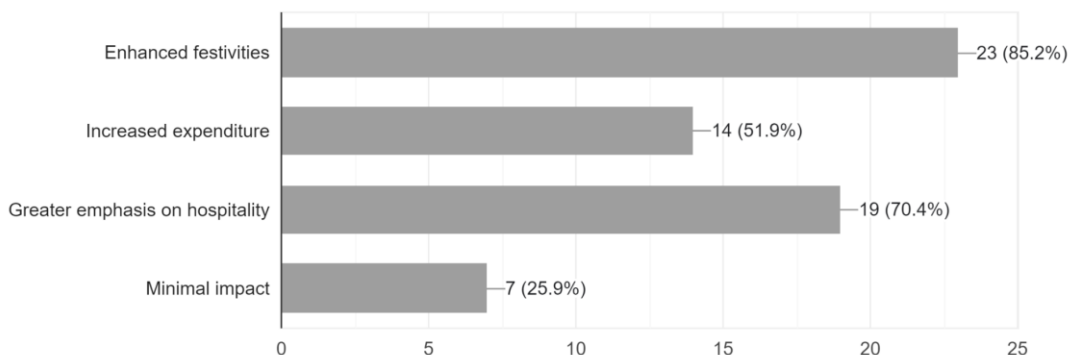
In your opinion, what role does affluence play in shaping the way Eid al-Fitr is celebrated within the upper-middle-class Muslim community?

28 responses



How has affluence influenced the way Eid al-Fitr is celebrated in your community? (Select all that apply)

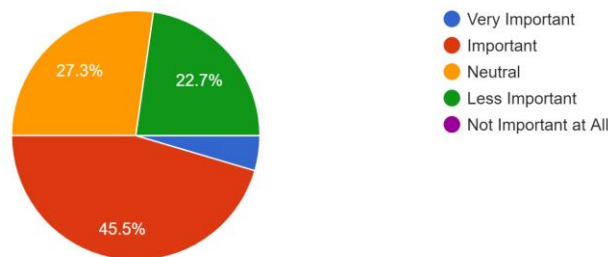
27 responses



The survey results underscore a substantial correlation between affluence and the nature of Eid celebrations among the participants. A significant majority (43%) assert that affluence plays a significant role, with an additional 29% acknowledging a moderate influence. When delving into the specifics of this influence, a

striking 85% of respondents assert that affluence enhances the overall celebratory experience. This sentiment is further underscored by 52% of respondents who identify increased expenditure as a tangible outcome of affluence, potentially translating into more lavish gifts, decorations, and culinary offerings during Eid. suggesting that financial prosperity not only enhances the overall experience but is also intricately linked to increased expenditure and a heightened emphasis on the cherished value of hospitality during this festive period. Notably, 70% of respondents recognise affluence as amplifying the emphasis on hospitality during Eid celebrations. This aligns with the sociological understanding that financial prosperity often influences social norms and rituals, transforming the communal and hospitable aspects of festivities. However, it is essential to acknowledge a minority viewpoint, as 11% of respondents perceive minimal impact of affluence on Eid celebrations.

How important is the preservation of traditional practices during Eid celebrations for you?
22 responses

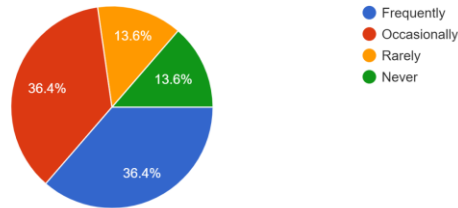


This analysis reveals a community where the preservation of traditional practices during Eid celebrations is predominantly valued, although there exists a noteworthy diversity of perspectives. A substantial majority, comprising 45% of respondents, deems the preservation of these practices as important. This underscores the enduring value placed on upholding cultural traditions, emphasising the role of Eid as a time-honoured occasion for the continuation of customary rituals (this is also reflected in the next question where respondents vocalise minimal change observed in customary rituals, as a result of modernisation).

Concurrently, 28% of respondents express a neutral stance, reflecting a segment of the community that neither strongly emphasises nor dismisses the importance of maintaining traditional practices during Eid. This ambivalence may be indicative of evolving attitudes or a willingness to adapt these practices in response to changing sociocultural dynamics. Interestingly, a notable 23% of respondents indicate that the preservation of traditional practices is less important to them. This viewpoint, while a minority, introduces a layer of complexity to the sociological understanding of how individuals within the community perceive the role of tradition in contemporary Eid celebrations, as it suggests a potential shift in priorities or a divergence in the perceived value of specific customs. Remarkably, there is a unanimous 0% of respondents who deem the preservation of traditional practices as "Not Important at All." This absence may signify a collective acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of tradition, amongst those who may not prioritise it highly.

How frequently do you or your community members engage in practices (e.g., gift-giving, feasts) during Eid al-Fitr that are influenced by global cultural trends?

22 responses



The data reflects a balanced spectrum of responses regarding the frequency with which individuals or community members engage in practices during Eid al-Fitr that are influenced by global cultural trends. A significant portion of 36% indicates that these practices are embraced frequently. This suggests a community actively attuned to and influenced by global cultural trends, where the integration of such influences is a recurrent and integral part of their Eid celebrations.

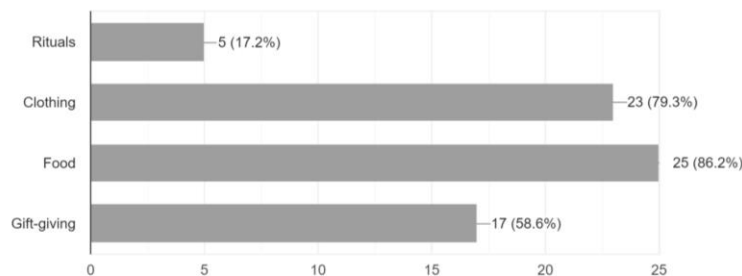
Similarly, another 36% of respondents note that engagement with global cultural trends occurs occasionally, indicating that the community is receptive to these influences but not consistently or exclusively guided by them, suggesting a dynamic blend of global and local elements in their celebratory practices.

On the other hand, 14% of respondents report rarely engaging in practices influenced by global cultural trends during Eid. This minority perspective suggests a measured approach or limited incorporation of global influences, with traditional practices remaining predominant.

A comparable 14% of respondents express that their community never engages in practices influenced by global cultural trends during Eid. This viewpoint signifies a conscious effort to preserve traditional elements without significant external influences.

Which specific aspects of Eid al-Fitr celebration have evolved the most in response to modernization and globalization? (Select all that apply)

29 responses



This analysis underscores the dynamic impact of modernization and globalisation on specific facets of Eid al-Fitr celebrations. The evolving nature of food, clothing, gift-giving, and to a lesser extent, rituals, signifies a complex interplay between tradition and contemporary influences within the sociocultural fabric of the community.

Notably, 86% of respondents identify food as the aspect that has evolved the most. This resounding majority suggests a significant shift in culinary practices, potentially influenced by globalised trends, increased access to diverse cuisines, and evolving dietary preferences.

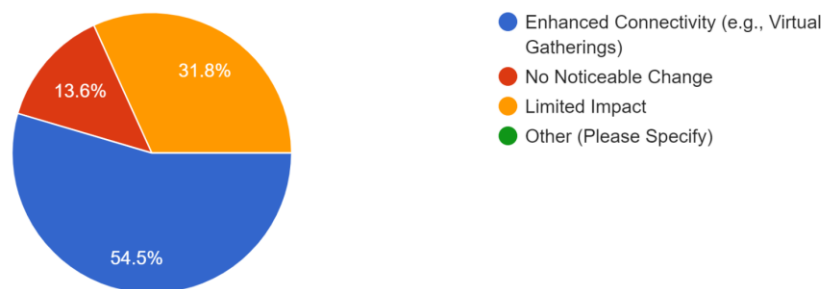
Following closely, clothing emerges as another highly impacted aspect, with 79% of respondents noting its evolution. This underscores the changing landscape of fashion and attire during Eid celebrations, pointing towards an increased emphasis on style, trends, and potentially, the influence of global fashion currents.

Gift-giving, identified by 59% of respondents, represents a noteworthy evolution that aligns with broader trends of consumerism and changing socio-economic dynamics. The emphasis on gifts may reflect a growing significance placed on material expressions of celebration, potentially influenced by globalised notions of exchange and gifting.

Rituals, marked by a relatively lower percentage at 17%, still represent a segment of the community that perceives changes in traditional practices during Eid. This might suggest a nuanced negotiation between preserving core rituals and adapting them in response to modernization and global influences.

In what ways have global changes, such as increased connectivity, affected how you celebrate Eid al-Fitr?

22 responses

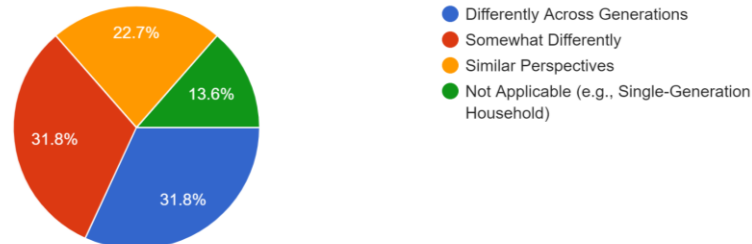


This analysis reveals a community that is actively integrating enhanced connectivity, primarily through virtual gatherings, into the fabric of Eid celebrations. The spectrum of responses, ranging from substantial adoption to limited impact, highlights the diversity of experiences within the community in response to the global changes of increased connectivity. A significant majority, constituting 54.4% of respondents, attests to the adoption of enhanced connectivity in the form of virtual gatherings. This reflects a paradigm shift in the way Eid is celebrated, indicating a widespread embrace of technology to foster connection and shared experiences, especially in the context of physical distance.

Contrastingly, 14% of respondents report no noticeable change in their Eid celebrations due to global changes. This suggests a segment of the community that, for various reasons, has not altered its traditional celebration practices despite the increased connectivity facilitated by global changes.

A notable 32% of respondents acknowledge a limited impact of global changes on their Eid celebrations. This middle-ground perspective suggests a nuanced adaptation, wherein connectivity has influenced some aspects of the celebration but has not entirely transformed traditional practices.

How do different generations within your family/community perceive the act of gift-giving during Eid?
22 responses



This analysis reveals a mosaic of perspectives on gift-giving during Eid across different generations. The variations, whether significant or subtle, contribute to the richness of cultural dynamics within the community, reflecting a blend of tradition, adaptation, and a diversity of viewpoints across varying age groups. A notable 32% of respondents express that perceptions of gift-giving differ significantly across generations within their family or community. This may signify evolving values, preferences, and cultural outlooks that contribute to distinct perspectives on the significance and nature of gift-giving during Eid. Similarly, another 32% of respondents note that different generations somewhat differ in their views on gift-giving during Eid. This suggests a middle ground where variations exist but may not be as pronounced. 23% of respondents observe that different generations share similar perspectives on gift-giving during Eid. This unity suggests a continuity of values and practices across generations, where the act of gift-giving is perceived consistently, highlighting the enduring nature of certain cultural aspects. For 14% of respondents, the question is deemed not applicable, typically in single-generation households. This acknowledgement suggests that, in some instances, the presence of multiple generations within a family (or community) might not be a factor influencing perceptions of gift-giving during Eid. To delve deeper into these findings, interviews were conducted among 2 participants, one aged 23 and the other aged 64.

Interview 1: with 64 yr. old women.

A resident of- Delhi

In your opinion, what are the most significant aspects of Eid al-Fitr celebrations that have evolved as a result of sociocultural changes? Can you provide examples to illustrate these changes?

One significant change is the visual transformation of celebrations. Social media has introduced a new aesthetic to Eid with visually appealing decorations, innovative recipes, and creative gift ideas. For instance, the emphasis on intricate and themed decorations, often inspired by Pinterest trends, has added a new layer of creativity and aesthetics to the traditional festivities.

Along with the introduction of online shopping which has played a significant role in making Eid preparations less of a hassle.

How has the frequency and nature of communal feasts during Eid evolved in your lifetime?

The frequency and nature of communal feasts during Eid have undergone notable changes in my lifetime. The advent of urbanisation has brought about a shift from intimate family gatherings to larger and more

diverse communal celebrations. With increased urbanisation, Eid has become an opportunity for larger community events, potluck-style feasts, and public celebrations in metropolitan areas, showcasing a more expansive and inclusive communal spirit.

Do you believe that urbanisation has played a role in shaping the evolution of Eid festivities, and if so, how?
Urbanisation has indeed played a role in shaping the evolution of Eid festivities. The bustling nature of urban life has influenced the communal aspects of celebrations, leading to more public events, organised gatherings, and community participation. Urban spaces, including parks and event venues, have become integral to the communal experience of Eid, reflecting the vibrancy and diversity of urban settings.

Have you observed changes in the significance of traditional practices during Eid based on the socioeconomic status of families?

Affluence has introduced more elaborate and stylized decorations, grander feasts, and extensive gift-giving practices among families with higher financial means. However, the essence of traditional practices remains, showcasing a delicate balance between upholding heritage and adapting to contemporary influences.

Does the younger generation express different preferences in terms of gifts compared to the older generation?

In my experience, younger generations in our community express different preferences in terms of gifts compared to older generations. While traditional gifts like clothing, sweets, prayer mats etc, the younger generation tends to appreciate technology gadgets, personalised experiences, and socially conscious gifts.

In fact, I would like to add that gift-giving as a practice is a fairly new tradition, as my mother's generation did not have it. I noticed it's onset myself actually, as my husband and I would visit the homes of his Hindu colleagues where gift-giving was a prominent feature, subsequently when we invited them to our house for Eid, we would bid them farewell with a gift. Children too, started wanting gifts for Eid when they saw their Hindu classmates get gifts for Diwali- so I conjure that's where the practice started.

Interview 2: with a 23-yr. old woman.

A resident of- Delhi

In your opinion, what are the most significant aspects of Eid al-Fitr celebrations that have evolved as a result of sociocultural changes? Can you provide examples to illustrate these changes?

In my perspective, one of the most significant evolutions in Eid al-Fitr celebrations is the integration of sociocultural changes, particularly influenced by social media platforms like Instagram and Pinterest. These platforms have become virtual canvases for creative expressions of Eid decorations, showcasing innovative and diverse ways of ornamenting homes and communal spaces. Traditionally, this might have been more localised, but now, it's a global exchange of ideas, influencing how we adorn our spaces during Eid. The emphasis on 'aesthetically pleasing' and culturally rich decorations has transformed the visual landscape of our celebrations.

Have any notable technological advancements influenced the way you and your community celebrate Eid al-Fitr? How have these changes been received within your community?

Social media platforms serve as platforms for sharing festive moments, allowing us to virtually connect with family and friends worldwide. Video calls and online platforms have become integral, especially for those

unable to physically join the celebrations. The reception has been overwhelmingly positive, as these technological innovations bridge gaps and enhance the sense of togetherness, irrespective of geographical distances.

From your perspective, how has globalisation affected the cultural diversity and practices within the upper-middle-class Muslim community during Eid al-Fitr celebrations? Can you give specific instances of these changes?

Globalisation, from my perspective, has significantly enriched the cultural diversity of Eid celebrations within the upper-middle-class Muslim community. Influences from various cultures have seamlessly integrated into our festivities. For example, globalised culinary trends, often discovered through platforms like Pinterest, have introduced diverse cuisines to our Eid feasts. Families now experiment with international dishes, combining traditional and global flavours that resonate with our cosmopolitan identity.

Do you believe that urbanisation has played a role in shaping the evolution of Eid festivities, and if so, how? *Urbanisation has undeniably shaped the evolution of Eid festivities in my experience. Living in urban settings has led to larger and more elaborate communal celebrations. Public spaces, event venues, and even shopping districts now play a crucial role in our Eid experiences.*

Have you observed changes in the significance of traditional practices during Eid based on the socioeconomic status of families?

Affluence often translates to more elaborate decorations, grander feasts, and extensive gift-giving. (However, families of varying economic means find unique ways to preserve and adapt these practices within the context of their socioeconomic status).

LIMITATIONS:

1. Selection of a topic that was unique, and did not overlap with the topic with the topic of another researcher, while having enough substance to research on.
2. Formation of the statement of purpose and research questions as they must be precise.
3. Finding research papers for literature review.
4. Subjectivity in Responses: The qualitative nature of certain data collection methods, such as interviews, introduces the potential for subjective interpretation.
5. Cultural Heterogeneity: The diversity within the upper-middle-class Muslim community may be a limiting factor.
6. Difficulty amongst the older generation in operating a Google Form.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, this sociological exploration into the changing nature of culture and tradition within the celebration of Eid al-Fitr among the upper-middle-class Muslim community in metropolitan areas, has unveiled a rich tapestry of insights. Through the lens of sociocultural changes, technological advancements, globalisation, and the influence of affluence, this study has navigated the evolving landscape of festivities. The interplay between tradition and contemporary influences, highlighted in the analysis, showcases the adaptability and resilience of cultural practices. As we reflect upon the findings, it becomes evident that the

celebration of Eid is far from a static ritual; rather, it is a dynamic expression of identity influenced by the winds of change. The findings illuminate the profound impact of technology on communal connectivity, emphasising the transformative role of virtual platforms in fostering a global sense of togetherness. Social media, particularly Instagram and Pinterest, emerged as influential agents, shaping perceptions of decor and elevating the visual aesthetics of Eid celebrations. Simultaneously, the study unravelled the multifaceted impact of affluence, amplifying the grandeur of festivities, from elaborate decorations to heightened emphasis on hospitality.

Globalisation emerged as a powerful force, contributing to a rich cultural tapestry by infusing diverse culinary influences into Eid feasts. Respondents highlighted a shift towards international cuisines, a testament to the cultural diffusion occurring within these urban landscapes. Urbanisation, the pulse of metropolitan life, showcased its influence in the scale and vibrancy of communal celebrations, transforming public spaces into integral venues for Eid festivities. Furthermore, the study captured the intricate dance between tradition and innovation, as respondents demonstrated a keen awareness of and adaptation to evolving cultural norms.

Amidst this dynamic evolution, the study unveiled the enduring significance of traditional practices, with the majority expressing their importance even in the face of contemporary influences. The nuanced variations in perspectives across different generations underscored the fluid nature of cultural identity, with gift-giving serving as a prism through which generational differences and shared values were refracted. Affluence, while contributing to the elevation of celebrations, introduced a spectrum of perspectives, revealing both its amplifying and, at times, minimal impact on the significance attached to traditional practices.

However, acknowledging the limitations, such as sampling bias and potential subjectivity in responses, prompts a cautious interpretation of the findings. As this exploration concludes, it is apparent that the celebration of Eid is a continuum, where tradition and modernity engage in a perpetual interplay, shaping and reshaping the cultural landscape.

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