



Original Research

## Illuminating Serenity: The Cultural Significance of Candles and Incense in Buddhism

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### ABSTRACT

In Bangladesh, the Buddhists constitute a minority group characterized by a wide range of customs and ceremonies. The study investigates the essential symbolism of candles and incense. Candles and incense play a significant role in Buddhism, carrying cultural, spiritual, and community importance. The candle's flame symbolizes enlightenment, shedding light on the way to wisdom and compassion. The aroma of incense represents the all-encompassing essence of the Buddha's teachings, diffusing tranquillity and calmness. This abstract examines the role of symbolic elements in Buddhist practices and rituals, highlighting their ability to enhance the spiritual experience and cultivate a profound connection to the holy. The research explores the symbolic and cultural importance of candles and incense in Buddhism, providing insight into the cultural customs that have been a fundamental aspect of Buddhist traditions for many years. The findings are consistent with the objectives of the research; however, they possess some distinctiveness. Although Buddhists regard candles and incense as symbols of purity, few are aware of their historical origins or the rationale behind their use. Individuals adhere to the common practice and employ it without much inquiry. This paper explores the significance and historical context of the materials in relation to Buddhist philosophy. Finally, irrespective of the passage of time, the society upholds its ritualistic customs of employing candles and incense.

### 1. Introduction

Candles and incense are basic components in our contemporary lifestyles. Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that these objects possess significant historical and cultural value to humanity (Sazzad et al., 2023). Candles have been utilized in both residential and religious contexts since ancient times. The object provided abundant illumination, combustion, warmth, pleasant scent, and served as a means of timekeeping (Moniruzzaman et al., 2023). Conversely, incense was created specifically for religious ceremonies in order to produce a pleasant and favorable aroma in prayer areas. Individuals have the belief that establishing a spiritual environment can guarantee the manifestation of God in their thoughts and inner being. Archaeological evidence suggests that humans have been using candles since at least 5000 B.C. (Sedokova, 2015). Its usage quickly became widespread. From everyday customs to religious rituals. Candles and incense have played a significant role in religious rituals for millennia. The

value of these artifacts arises from their indispensable reliance on fire and smoke. In order to cultivate a sense of tranquility and enhance the spiritual atmosphere in places of worship (Islam et al., 2023). From a religious standpoint, these artifacts facilitate a deeper connection with universal awareness since "the essence of the prayer permeates the household" (Gore, 2020). Candles consist of materials such as wax, wick, scents, and essential oils. Wax may be easily molded, resulting in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Incense sticks are available in several formats (Britannica, 2023). In ancient times, candles and incense were employed as means of measuring time during periods when the sun was not observable. Additionally, it served as a means for administering medication and employing natural remedies (Sedakova, 2015). In contemporary society, it continues to be utilized for the purposes of meditation, aromatherapy, and yoga inside residential settings, with the intention of imbuing the environment with a feeling of purified energy (Sunny et al., 2020; Kuddus et al., 2021). Religious rituals continue to extensively utilize it in the present era (Gore, 2020; Kuddus et al., 2020). Candles and incense are commonly used in our country for many purposes. The purpose could be either personal or religious in nature. Examples include celebrations, birthdays, festivals, mourning days, meditations, prayers, and so on. Individuals often engage in the practice of lighting candles and incense as a means of demonstrating reverence and dedication to their spiritual beliefs. In order to demonstrate their unwavering trust in their religious convictions and pay homage to their deities (Barua, 2001; Chakma et al., 2022).

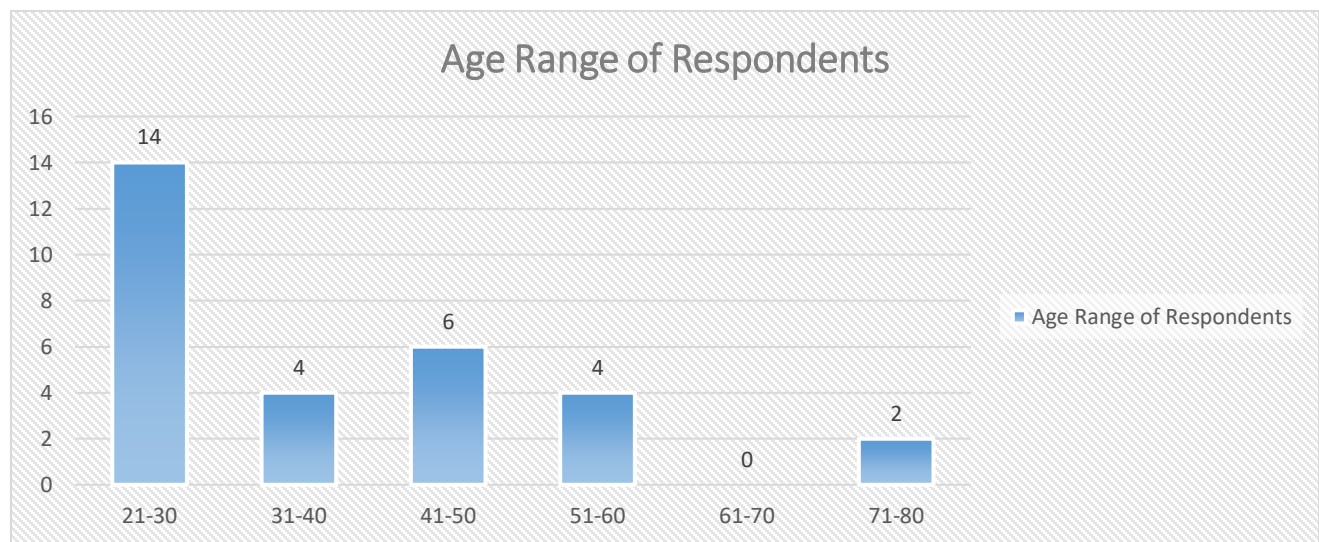
The migration of Arakan Buddhists to Bangladesh occurred because of historical events including World War II, the partition of India and Pakistan, and the Liberation of Bangladesh. The Buddhist migrants from Burma established themselves in Chittagong and progressively assimilated into the Bengali ethnicity due to the diminishing influence of Burmese culture (Tinti, 1998). Due to the imposition of Bengali nationalism by the dominant group, Buddhists who had previously been connected to Burma swiftly assimilated into Bengali culture and society, identifying themselves as Bengali Buddhists. The purpose of this definition was to establish a distinction between the practitioners of the Theravada tradition and the indigenous people who also follow this tradition (Tinti, 1998). South Asia is home to adherents of the Theravada tradition, who observe the sacred scriptures recited by Buddha. Despite the distinction of community identity from other Buddhist communities in the hill tracts, Bengali Buddhists remain steadfast in their adherence to the teachings of Theravada Buddhism to some extent (Tinti, 1998).

## **2. Research Methodology**

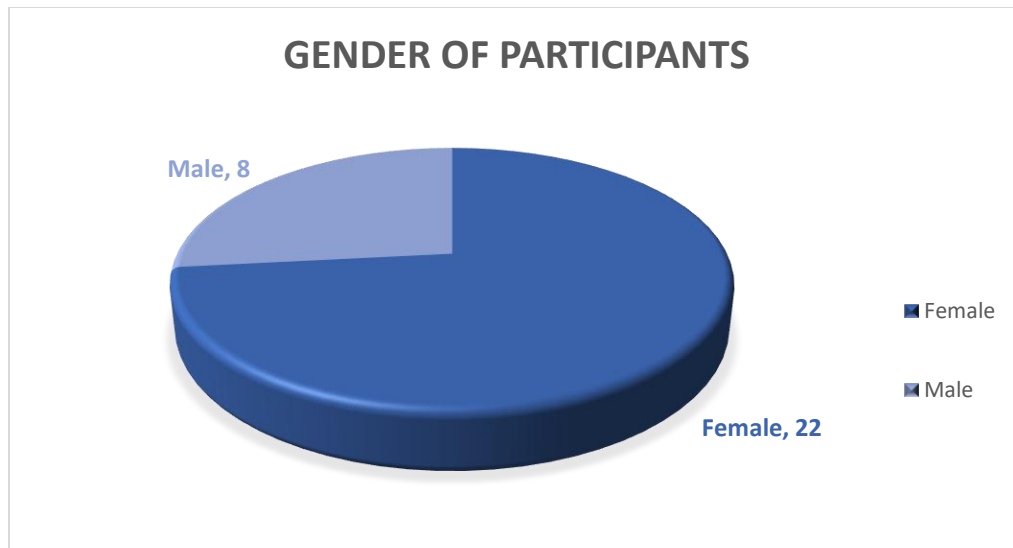
The researcher chose to concentrate on gathering data from the Pagoda of 'Anath Bazar Buddha Bihar' in Chittagong. The reason for choosing this site is its strategic location in Chittagong, which serves as a major centre for the Buddhist community. Chittagong is home to almost one million Buddhists, including those residing in the hill tracts (Canada, 2023). Our extensive knowledge of the area and its sociocultural environment substantially facilitated our research endeavours. Being part of this community granted us the privilege of easily visiting the pagodas and interacting with the local populace, which was crucial for carrying out efficient fieldwork. Based on our own on-

site research, the population of Buddhists in the study region is more than 100.

The snowball sampling strategy was used for sampling, which is a non-probability method where initial participants assist in recruiting other informants from their relationships (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). This method was especially valuable for identifying individuals with distinct attributes, thereby guaranteeing a thorough representation of the Buddhist population in the region. We collected data from a total of 30 individuals using this approach, including 22 Buddhists, 2 Muslims, and 6 Hindus. The informants served as the primary sources of data and played a vital role in our study. The secondary sources comprised of previously published monographs, journals, novels, and magazine articles. We employed many methods for data collecting, including unstructured interviews, in-depth interviews, and observation. Unstructured interviews consisted of casual discussions with participants regarding their ritual experiences and the utilization of candles and incense. Conducting in-depth interviews allowed for a more comprehensive examination of these subjects. Utilizing observation, a crucial qualitative research technique, enabled us to acquire a comprehensive comprehension of the social and cultural behaviours inside the community. By employing these techniques, we were able to acquire a comprehensive and insightful comprehension of the cultural and spiritual rituals associated with the utilization of candles and incense within the Buddhist community, thereby successfully attaining the goals of our research. Engage in academic or intellectual pursuits.



**Figure 1: Age of the respondents**



**Figure 2: Gender of the participants**

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### *3.1 Candle and Incense*

Throughout history, candles and incense have played a significant role in shaping human existence. Electricity is a creation of modern humans. The utilization of clocks, light bulbs, and heaters is also included. However, in the past, these individuals relied extensively on fire (Bari et al., 2023; Hossain et al., 2023a). The prehistoric man's first invention was fire. Even in the present era, it continues to possess unparalleled significance, it is not easily replaceable (Alam et al., 2023a; Rana et al., 2023). Fire exerted a significant impact on early civilized societies, since they employed it for many purposes (Hossain et al., 2023b; Sunny et al., 2023). Since fire served as a means of generating heat and illumination, candles were introduced to fulfill the role of providing light during the nighttime. Wicked candles have been utilized by the Egyptians since 3000 B.C., although there is ongoing controversy over their exact origins. The ancient Egyptians utilized animal fat and beeswax to create rushlights for illuminating their dwellings. Nevertheless, the ancient Romans had already been used the malevolent candle prior to that period. The papyrus scrolls were immersed in molten beeswax or animal fat to create candles. The Romans utilized torches to illuminate residences and provide guidance to travelers at nighttime and ceremonial occasions (Lewis, 2021).

Subsequently, candles have evolved into a ubiquitous household commodity utilized by individuals as an illuminating medium. Gradually, it evolved into being introduced specifically for ritualistic purposes. Candles were lit and extensively employed in religious locations for conducting prayers. Beeswax candles were costly, thus limiting their usage to the Church and the affluent. During the Middle Ages, animal fat or tallow candles were widely utilized by common individuals throughout Europe due to their affordability (Lewis, 2021). Incense was developed

with the purpose of diffusing fragrance and odor into an environment. This substance is composed of gum, resin, and wood powder, and it is resistant to decay. In antiquity, the sanitation infrastructure was less advanced compared to the present day. In order to prevent the intrusion of unpleasant aromas and odors into sacred locations, incense was created as fragrant sticks that could be burned, so filling the air with a pleasant perfume. Eliminating unpleasant odors and cultivating a more tranquil environment. In addition, there existed a medical belief that incense possessed the ability to ward off diseases. This belief stemmed from the fact that during medieval times, diseases and viruses were frequently transmitted through the air. The act of burning incense, which masked unpleasant odors, was seen as a sign that it could eliminate these diseases. According to Kenna (2005), it had positive effects on the body.

### *3.2 Symbolism*

Symbols are tangible or abstract representations that convey specific notions or ideas (Alam et al., 2023a). The concepts do not necessarily have to be interpreted in a literary manner. Figuratively, it might have various connotations. Symbols are essential in society and civilizations as they facilitate communication, comprehension, and connection among groups of people (Elbom, 2020). Among the interviewees, a few recognized the symbolic significance of candles and incense as representative of religious devotion, but others interpreted them as a symbol of tranquillity. Rodoyon Barua, aged 55, expressed his perspective on the matter, stating, "I perceive it as an artifact imbued with cultural heritage and historical significance." However, individuals such as Prottoy Barua (21) claim that they are unaware of the significance of these items and have no inclination to learn about them. There is a subtle disparity among the generations. While the elder individuals appreciate the significance of these components and their utilization. The younger generation does not hold it in the same esteem and use it solely for the purpose of adhering to family traditions and beliefs. However, this phenomenon is not universal, as there are instances where certain young individuals have a strong sense of religious faith and commitment to ritualistic customs.

### *3.3 The use of Candles and incense in daily lives*

Candles are commonly used in the daily life of Bengali Buddhists. They employ it consistently and ceremonially. While candles and incense can serve practical functions, they are primarily utilized for religious rituals. According to Shima Barua, a 60-year-old individual, the purpose of using it is mostly for religious activities, particularly for nighttime prayers. Primarily, we utilize it predominantly throughout religious sanctuaries. Primarily, I utilize candles. It appears that people frequently and consistently utilize it both at home and at Pagodas. Typically, they illuminate candles and burn incense primarily throughout the evening and when they go to their temple. Before engaging in prayer, they ensure to light the candle and incense at their allocated spot. There is no established protocol for the illumination procedure of the aforementioned Megna Barua (40). She stated that she ignites them both in the morning and evening for the purpose of prayer. Some

individuals suggested that it is customary to ignite candles and incense before to engaging in prayer.

Women typically utilize it routinely in their households during the evening while engaging in prayer. They are perceived as highly pious and utilize these products for their spiritual requirements. Regarding Kanok Barua (50), it appears that... According to her, she frequently utilizes it to enhance the spiritual and pure atmosphere of her home. Although guys may use them during religious festivals, they are not as inclined to use them regularly. They tend to illuminate them for special occasions and events. When it is a custom. Rodoyon Barua (55) also mentioned his occasional use of candles and incense. He is aware of the religious and cultural significance of these artifacts, yet he does not consistently utilize them. Men are underrepresented in leading morning or evening prayers. They attribute it to their professional lifestyle, despite their religious beliefs. While they acknowledge their identity, they appear to exert less effort compared to their colleagues who are the most dedicated in the process. Young boys such as Protik Barua (21) stated, "I utilize these items because they are used by everyone else in the family." I comply with instructions as given. This demonstrates that despite not attaching significant importance to these items, he adheres to the routines due to familial customs. Due to the communal significance of lighting candles and incense, the individual is compelled to partake as well.

### *3.4 How they view candles and incense*

For several adherents of Buddhism, the use of a candle represents a symbolic gesture of establishing a spiritual link between their supplications and their revered instructor, Lord Buddha. While they do not have specific religious laws akin to those of Hindus or Christians, they nonetheless have a deep cultural tradition of using lights and incense at home in the evening, accompanied by prayers to their deity. The reason they engage in this behavior is due to their perception of the candle as a representation of enlightenment, a small and fleeting source of illumination amidst obscurity. Incense is regarded as a representation of both purity and spirituality. Through the utilization of these objects, individuals discover a sense of spiritual and religious sanctity. The religious texts of Buddhists make reference to the usage of candles and incense by devotees during prayers in the presence of Lord Buddha and the Monks who adhere to his teachings. However, there are no specific guidelines or procedures outlined for the lighting of candles and incense.

The esteemed monk Praggajit (35) stated that the act of lighting a candle serves as a representation of both enlightenment and selflessness. The candle symbolizes illumination, representing the guiding light on the path to 'Nirvana' as taught by Buddha. Candles consume themselves in order to emit illumination for others and to dispel darkness. Essentially, candles selflessly expend themselves to illuminate the world and dispel the darkness within one's heart. By illuminating candles, individuals gain insight into the importance of living a virtuous and unselfish life, characterized by wisdom and purity of mind. This practice serves as a means of connecting with the spiritual realms of virtue.

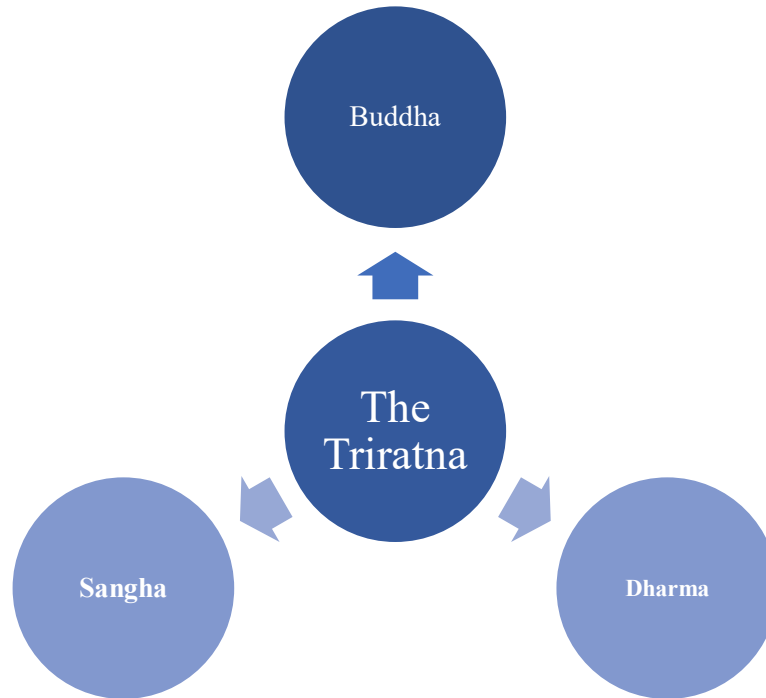
Incense diffuses fragrant particles throughout the atmosphere, establishing a tranquil environment conducive to cultivating a spiritual state of mind. It serves as a representation of psychological tranquility and cleansing. It has the ability to cleanse the area where it is applied and imbue it with a sense of spirituality. The incense combusts autonomously, generating fragrant smoke that symbolizes a commitment to enduring challenges and demonstrating empathy towards others. Compassion is a fundamental principle in Buddhist theology, considered equally significant as 'Nirvana' and knowledge. Although some individuals may perceive no significance or worth in the practice, they nonetheless engage in it due to its historical connection with their religion and its deep-rooted presence in their culture, regardless of their personal viewpoints. Incense holds significant value for Muslims. It is utilized in festivals, Mosques, and Majar's for its aromatic properties. However, they also utilize it for routine purposes such as power outages and occasionally for rejuvenation. Faria Masud, aged 24, stated that she does not frequently utilize incense sticks. Incense sticks are primarily utilized for religious rituals. During Ramadan, we utilize them in our household following iftar. It generates a favourable atmosphere and vitality that instils tranquillity in our mind and soul. Hindus primarily utilize incense for their Arti and Pujas. Dhup is predominantly utilized during Kali Puja as an offering to the Goddess. Sushama Roy Bristy, aged 24, expressed that she considers candles and incense to be significant. They imbue her with spiritual essence and establish a tranquil atmosphere.

### *3.5 Basics of Buddhist teaching*

The cultural significance of candles and incense in Buddhist religious rites is extensive, as previously mentioned. They cover a wide range of symbolic, spiritual, and societal significance. These factors are essential in influencing the cultural identity of Buddhist practices, cultivating a feeling of attachment to tradition and spirituality. Buddhist theology encompasses distinct periods of existence that are directed by the principle of 'Dharma'. These stages are cycles that individuals will be born into based on the assessment of their virtues and faults. The nature of the cosmos is characterized by its cyclical nature, resembling a rotating wheel. The Bhava-chakra, derived from the Sanskrit term "bhava" meaning becoming, is a visual depiction in Buddhism that illustrates the ceaseless cycle of rebirths regulated by the principle of dependent origination. It is portrayed as a wheel held by a monstrous figure, signifying the transient nature of existence (Tikkanen, 2008).

There are three primary tenets of Buddhism that all followers must revere and adhere to. The first figure is the Lord Buddha, who serves as a mentor or instructor, guiding individuals towards the road of enlightenment through his teachings. His spoken words transformed into a sacred hymn of prayers meticulously transcribed in scriptures. The second aspect is known as 'Dharma', which refers to the teachings of Buddha that Buddhists adhere to in order to cultivate virtue and wisdom as a way of life. The Sangha refers to a society of monks who diligently follow the teachings of

Buddhism in their daily lives, striving to attain enlightenment, also known as 'Aurohot' (Tabor, 2023).



**Figure:4 The triratna**

### *3.6 Spiritual Significance:*

In the Buddhist context, candles and incense are not mere accessories, they are considered conduits for spiritual practice. As stated, before they symbolize wisdom, compassion, holiness, and serenity. Lighting a candle or burning incense is a ritualistic act, one which signifies mindfulness and the offering of one's intentions to the divine. It helps create a space of purity where one can pray to the lord. The sensory experience engages the individual in mindful awareness, fostering a connection between the physical and spiritual realms that leads them to actively connect to their religion.

Like Dipali Barua (77) said, " I use it daily for praying to the Buddha. Using these things gives me religious and spiritual peace. It gives my mind calmness and my soul hope. We light the candle and incense for praying. These objects also help me focus myself on my prayers and rituals." As stated by Dipali using these items at home gives her a sense of peace and stability. It helps keep her home pure in her mind and she can live and do her religious rituals properly.



The rising smoke of incense signifies the ascension of prayers and intentions to the lord. It gives people the idea that their prayers are heard or seen by the Buddha even though it is not logical to assume that. Since the Buddha achieved Nirvana his soul ended its rebirth, blending into the essence of the universe. The act of burning incense has become a ritual of purification, cleansing the mind and surroundings, creating a sacred space in people's minds. While the candle lights up the environment and illuminates the space. Candles, with their gentle glow, symbolize the illumination of wisdom and the dispelling of ignorance in Buddhism. The act of lighting a candle is not merely a practical source of light. It represents the journey from darkness to enlightenment. The flickering flame becomes a metaphor for the awakened mind, casting away the shadows of ignorance. To know and seek the knowledge of wisdom that ends the vanities of life.

Venerable Praggajit (35) said that lighting candles and incense brings peace to the mind and body and earns an individual virtue. However, there are a few who do not see or understand the essence of spirituality of these objects. As observed from the data collected from the 30 people, while most connected to the spirituality of candles and incense, 4 of them did not. The only similarity among those 4 people was that they were young adult males who did not seem that religiously active or devoted to their religion. This is not to say they do not participate in religious rituals or ceremonies. It is an observation of the fact that from these 4 young males 2 of them are brothers living in the same family, have a slightly different opinion than the other family members. Nonetheless, through these rituals, practitioners engage in a sensory and contemplative journey, reinforcing the spiritual essence of their cultural practices and the traditions of their community.

### *3.7 Cultural Continuity and Tradition*

Candles and incense have a role in maintaining the ongoing cultural traditions of Buddhism. These rites have been transmitted across many generations. Fostering a collective sense of shared experience and cultural heritage within Buddhist groups. The aroma of incense and the sight of flickering candles are deeply ingrained in cultural identity, creating a strong bond between the past and present for individuals. Candles and incense have long been essential elements of Buddhist rituals, symbolizing a cultural tradition that has endured for countless generations. Venerable Praggajit (35) explained that these things serve the purpose of honoring spiritual individuals, knowledgeable individuals, deceased relatives, and are also utilized in graves for the deceased. Candles and incense can be utilized in any form of reverential and ceremonial practice or event. Buddhists attach great importance to the utilization of these objects in traditional rituals. They engage in prayers and conduct regular ceremonies to ensure the welfare of their deceased relatives in the hereafter. This exemplifies the tradition of commemorating the deceased and acknowledging that life continues even after someone's death. They conduct religious ceremonies to foster a collective recollection and affection for the deceased individual.

The persistent utilization of these elements in ceremonies and daily activities functions as a connection to the past, safeguarding the rituals and traditions that delineate Buddhist culture. The utilization of candles and incense in Buddhist customs exemplifies the transfer of spiritual and cultural wisdom from one lineage to the succeeding one. By engaging in the practice of lighting a candle or burning incense, elders or parents transmit not only the tangible actions but also the symbolic significance, narratives, and teachings linked to these rituals, thereby guaranteeing the continuation of cultural knowledge and legacy. Bobby Barua, aged 45, stated that she routinely ignites candles and incense at her residence as part of her daily prayer ritual. In addition, she instructed her sons to engage in prayer. She expressed her intention to transmit the history and custom of igniting the materials as a means of showing respect and fostering peace.

Megna Barua, aged 40, instructs her children to ignite candles and incense as a preliminary ritual before engaging in evening prayers. The purpose is to impart religious principles and emphasize the significance of dedication. As a parent, it is incumbent upon me to educate my children about the customs and practices of our community. The utilization of candles and incense serves as a concrete manifestation of the wider cultural essence of Buddhism. Despite the absence of formal religious codes, Buddhism appears to be deeply rooted in its fundamental principles. However, they continue to utilize it in a manner that reflects the customs and practices they have acquired throughout the course of their lives and historical background. Rodela Barua (24) mentioned that she utilizes it due to its cultural significance. It imbues our home with tranquility and cleanliness. I have acquired proficiency in using it from an early age. Typically, I employ it for the purpose of engaging in prayers and performing rituals. It is significant to our religion.

The utilization of candles and incense in diverse rituals and festivities highlights their significance in maintaining cultural tradition. From significant religious festivals to daily devotions, burial rituals, and marriages, these components remain consistent in the ceremonial schedule of Buddhist communities. Their unwavering presence strengthens the customs that establish the cultural bond of Buddhism. The utilization of candles and incense in Buddhist traditions not only preserves cultural continuity but also demonstrates the adaptable character of these practices. Various Buddhist cultures and groups may exhibit distinct differences in their utilization of these aspects. The specificities of color, materials, and even size might fluctuate throughout different Buddhist societies. Adjacent to the temple, there are street stalls that offer candles, incense, and flowers specifically for the purpose of prayer. Furthermore, it is worth noting that while regarding candles and incense as symbols of purity, people show little concern about the origins and production processes of these items. Whether it is animal fat or beeswax, no one could determine. They employ it with the belief that it possesses sacred qualities, whereas in reality, it does not. The ability to adapt ensures that the cultural importance of candles and incense stays relevant in many contexts and situations. Candles and incense in Buddhism have played a significant role in maintaining cultural continuity and tradition throughout the religion's extensive history. These characteristics establish a connection between the past, present, and future, safeguarding the

fundamental aspects of Buddhist culture and fostering a collective sense of identity among its followers.

### *3.8 Communal Experience*

The utilization of candles and incense in Buddhist ceremonies further amplifies the social dimension of worship. Group rituals frequently entail the joint act of igniting candles and burning incense, resulting in a communal sensory encounter. This collective participation enhances the feeling of membership and solidarity among those who practice Buddhism, so strengthening the cultural foundation of the Buddhist community. Engaging in group rituals entails the collective engagement of individuals in the act of lighting candles and burning incense. This collective participation fosters a collective experience, as individuals unite to carry out ceremonies that connect them as a community. What distinguishes them from others. The majority of individuals perceive a distinction between their own community and other cultures that utilize candles and incense. It fosters a feeling of solidarity within the community.

During momentous Buddhist events and festivals, the collective experience is intensified as sizable congregations gather to participate in rites and prayers. The simultaneous utilization of candles and incense during these festivities strengthens the feeling of being part of a broader spiritual community. These community gatherings play a crucial role in strengthening cultural and religious identity, firmly establishing them in the minds of individuals as an integral aspect of their Buddhist identity. Buddhists are familiar with the practice of using candles and incense, which is also observed in other groups. However, they still differentiate between its usage. They observe a distinction in the practices of people from other religions, as they utilize candles and incense with a specific purpose. They believe they assign significance to these artifacts in a manner that is distinct from other groups. Lasu Marma, aged 47, stated, "There exists a distinction." We utilize it for engaging in prayer and cultivating moral excellence. No, they do not. They engage in this activity as a form of religious devotion. We do not engage in the worship of our Buddha. We hold him in high regard. He possesses the highest level of knowledge and wisdom among all individuals in this world, which is why we adhere to his teachings and hold him in high regard.

Faria Masud, a 24-year-old individual, expressed that incense sticks are primarily utilized by adherents of the Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist faiths for religious reasons. Candles are commonly employed by adherents of Christianity and Buddhism. However, in both instances, the objective appears to be identical: to establish a heavenly and sacred atmosphere that fosters tranquility in one's mind and spirit, while also cultivating positive energy in their surroundings. Faria observes a consistent and deliberate utilization of candles and incense in various religious communities, which stands in stark contrast to the beliefs and practices of Buddhism. Kabori Rani Roy (24) stated that she believes individuals of various religious faiths also utilize incense and candles. Observing individuals practicing the Christian faith, I saw their utilization of candles during prayer. Similarly, Buddhist monks incorporate the use of incense during their meditation

sessions. Individuals behave based on their own personal convictions. Therefore, the decision to utilize incense and candles during prayer is a matter of personal preference. Regardless of religious distinctions, I believe that individuals of all faiths utilize incense and candles as a means to enhance the prayer experience and cultivate a sense of serenity and joy. Kabori also observes the resemblance in the utilization of these goods, which she perceives as alike. While acknowledging potential variations in individual usage, she emphasizes the consistent significance and worth of it. Essentially, the collective utilization of candles and incense in Buddhist ceremonies surpasses personal activities, establishing a social environment for prayer, meditation, and contemplation. This collaborative involvement enhances the connections within the Buddhist community, cultivating a feeling of oneness and interdependence in the quest for spiritual development and enlightenment. Even those with different religious beliefs can find common ground through shared practices. Although they continue to establish limits, they acknowledge the presence of comparable utilization of candles and incense in other individuals' lives.

The majority of the individuals from whom information was collected for this study fell within the age bracket of 21 to 30 years old, accounting for 47% of the informants. Conversely, the age ranges of 61 to 70 and 71 to 80 had the lowest representation among the informants, with 0% and 7% respectively. Many individuals interviewed have provided comparable responses to the established objectives, while notable variations will be examined in this discussion. Firstly, there is a higher proportion of female informants compared to males. The reason for this was the higher presence of females compared to males in the region (Sedokova, 2015). Even the current individuals did not appear to be interested in participating. The individuals who responded to the interviews provided brief and contemptuous replies. They displayed a lack of enthusiasm towards the research matter (Gore, 2020). Therefore, there are 22 female informants compared to 8 male informants. Due to the prevalence of younger informants, there was a noticeable disparity in comprehension and perspectives regarding the materials. The symbolism of candles and incense goes beyond the Bengali Buddhist community, resonating with practitioners from many Buddhist lineages, surpassing religious barriers to impact other cultures and belief systems. According to Sushama Roy Bristy (24), these rituals have significance and attraction for those who are searching for spiritual satisfaction and inner tranquility, as they are associated with the universal concepts of enlightenment and purification. Candles and incense have the ability to establish an ambiance of tranquility, enabling individuals, irrespective of their religious beliefs, to establish a connection with inner serenity and spirituality during times of distress. Candles evoke a feeling of tranquility and serenity within an individual. Incense possesses analogous characteristics that aid in calming the mind and body (Gore, 2020).

Nevertheless, an exceptional case emerged during the course of this inquiry. Numerous Buddhists lack knowledge regarding the historical origins of candles and incense. They also make no effort to search for it (Venerable, 2023). Consequently, the majority of people are uninformed of the source and purpose of it. Similar findings were noted for the Muslim and Hindu participants in the

study. Furthermore, they lacked knowledge about the genesis or history of it. The Buddhists appeared indifferent to whether the candles and incense being used adhered to pure procedures or not. Despite perceiving the things as pure, individuals neglect to acknowledge their constituent elements. It is well recognized that although they highly value the objects, it is not a crucial aspect that requires attentive monitoring (Venerable, 2023). They utilize it for the sake of its symbolism and cultural legacy that has been transmitted through history. They hold a high regard for and appreciate the conventions and traditions associated with these artifacts more than the objects themselves. Candles and incense, whether used in religious rituals or for personal reflection and focus, remain significant symbols of spiritual illumination and cultural legacy. They enhance the lives of practitioners and provide a stronger connection to the divine.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study aimed to investigate the symbolic meaning of candles and incense and their cultural value to the Bengali Buddhist community. The study examined the regular utilization of candles and incense, exploring their symbolic significance, worth, and importance to the spirituality, cultural heritage, and communal bonding of the community. Candles and incense represent the utilization of fire and smoke for the purpose of illuminating and purifying. Candles symbolize illumination, erudition, and sagacity through their flame, whilst incense symbolizes serenity, calmness, and spirituality. These artifacts possess cultural significance in relation to spirituality, continuity, and fostering a sense of community. Despite the negative associations, the practice of utilizing these sacred objects continues to exist in the present era. While Buddhists may not possess extensive knowledge of the historical significance of these materials, they still regard them as sacred objects of purity within a religious context. A similar sentiment is observed in other groups. Consequently, the research partially achieves its objective by recognizing the cultural and traditional significance of candles and incense, despite the limited comprehension of their purpose by a small number of individuals. They serve as integral components of religious practices and rituals throughout the community.

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#### **Author Contribution**

Each author took involved in the creation of the study design, data analysis, fieldwork, and execution stages. Every writer gave their consent after seeing the final work.

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#### **A statement of conflicting interests**

The authors declare that none of the work reported in this study could have been impacted by any known competing financial interests or personal relationships.

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