

*Original Research*

## Tradition in Transition: Social Change, Community Identity, and Local Institutions in Noakhali, Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** Bangladesh has undergone substantial social transformation in recent decades, shaped by expanding education, infrastructural development, improved communication, local governance changes, and broader processes of modernization. However, much of the existing discussion remains focused on national-level trends, giving less attention to how change is experienced and interpreted within specific local communities. This study explores social transformation in Noakhali, Bangladesh, with particular emphasis on community identity, everyday social practices, and the mediating role of local institutions. The study adopted an exploratory mixed-methods case study design using both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through questionnaire-based surveys and semi-structured interviews involving community respondents and selected institutional informants connected to educational and municipal settings. Descriptive analysis was used to interpret patterns of continuity and change in language, food habits, dress, religion, transport, market organization, educational practices, and disaster preparedness, while qualitative evidence was used to contextualize institutional development and local civic functions.

The findings indicate that the study area has experienced clear transformation in the material and organizational dimensions of everyday life, particularly in transportation, office environments, educational practices, market systems, and public preparedness for disasters. At the same time, strong continuity remains in cultural and social identity, especially in language, religious affiliation, food practices, and place-based belonging. The evidence further suggests that institutions such as Noakhali Government Girls' High School and Noakhali Municipality play important roles in organizing education, civic services, and local adaptation, thereby mediating broader social change. The study concludes that social transformation in Noakhali is best understood not as a simple replacement of tradition by modernity, but as a layered process in which continuity and change coexist. Although limited by small purposively selected samples and a localized evidence base, the study offers a contextually grounded perspective on how community-level social transformation unfolds in coastal Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Social transformation; Community identity; Local institutions; Noakhali; Bangladesh

## 1. Introduction

Social change is a multidimensional process involving shifts in institutions, values, identities, everyday practices, and forms of social organization. It rarely occurs as a simple replacement of old social forms by new ones. Rather, change usually unfolds through negotiation, adaptation, and selective continuity. Major social theorists have shown that modernity restructures social life through expanding education, communication systems, bureaucratic organization, mobility, and market integration, while communities often retain deeply rooted forms of cultural belonging, memory, and local identity (**Giddens, 1990; Beck, 1992; Inglehart & Baker, 2000**). In many developing societies, these tensions are especially visible because processes of modernization advance alongside strong attachments to language, locality, religion, family structure, and inherited social norms (**Appadurai, 1996; Hall, 1990; Lewis, 2011**). Bangladesh offers a particularly relevant setting for examining this interaction, as the country has experienced notable changes in education, governance, infrastructure, urban growth, and public aspiration while still maintaining deeply embedded cultural and community-based social structures (**Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2023; UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2023**).

Research on social transformation in Bangladesh has frequently focused on macro-level trends such as poverty reduction, educational expansion, demographic change, and urbanization. These developments are important, but they do not fully explain how change is lived, interpreted, and negotiated within specific local settings. National trends often appear differently when viewed from the community level, where social transformation is shaped by local history, institutional capacity, environmental condition, and collective perception. In this sense, the local community becomes an important analytical site because it reveals how broad structural changes affect everyday life in practice. Changes in transport, communication, educational access, market systems, and local governance do not simply alter infrastructure; they also reshape social relations, expectations, mobility, and forms of belonging (**Cohen, 2006; Montgomery, 2008; United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2022**). At the same time, local language, place attachment, religious participation, and cultural memory may remain highly resilient, producing a social condition in which continuity and change coexist rather than cancel each other (**Anderson, 2006; Hall, 1990; Sen, 1999**).

This coexistence is especially important in coastal and semi-urban regions of Bangladesh, where modernization intersects with environmental vulnerability, institutional adaptation, and changing patterns of settlement and mobility. In such settings, social change is shaped not only by development but also by disaster preparedness, ecological uncertainty, and the need for local resilience. Coastal communities often experience transformation through infrastructural expansion, educational growth, improved local services, and stronger public awareness, while still relying on localized forms of solidarity and cultural continuity (**Ahmed et al., 2016; Alam & Dominey-Howes, 2015; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022; Islam & Walkerden, 2014**). This makes a coastal Bangladeshi district such as Noakhali especially relevant for investigating how continuity and change interact in practice. The area offers a useful setting for examining how residents perceive social transformation, how community identity remains anchored in familiar cultural forms, and how local institutions respond to changing civic and developmental demands.

Local institutions play a critical role in this process because they do not merely reflect change; they also organize and mediate it. Schools, municipalities, marketplaces, and other civic structures shape how people encounter

authority, opportunity, service delivery, and collective life. Municipal institutions influence local society through roads, sanitation, registration, markets, lighting, and environmental management, thereby contributing directly to the organization of everyday civic order (**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2009; Panday, 2011; Siddiqui, 2000**). Educational institutions are equally important because they function not only as sites of instruction but also as spaces of discipline, aspiration, socialization, and civic reproduction (**Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2009; Asadullah & Yalonetzky, 2012; UNESCO, 2023**). Understanding local social transformation therefore requires attention not only to how communities perceive change but also to how institutions shape and stabilize that change in everyday life.

Despite the importance of these issues, relatively few localized studies have brought together community identity, everyday social change, and institutional life within a single analytical framework in Bangladesh. Existing work often addresses governance, education, vulnerability, or development separately, without fully explaining how these processes intersect in a concrete community setting. This gap matters because local identity cannot be understood independently of the institutions through which it is reinforced, challenged, and adapted. Likewise, institutions cannot be understood fully in administrative terms alone if their social significance depends on local culture, memory, and civic relationships. In this context, exploratory mixed-methods case studies are particularly valuable because they allow descriptive survey findings to be interpreted alongside interview-based and documentary evidence (**Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018**).

Against this background, the present study examines social transformation in Noakhali, Bangladesh, through the interconnected lenses of community identity, everyday social practice, and local institutional change. It explores how residents describe continuity and transformation in language, food habits, dress, religion, transport, educational practice, market organization, and public preparedness, and how institutions such as Noakhali Government Girls' High School and Noakhali Municipality reflect and mediate these processes. The study argues that social transformation in Noakhali is best understood not as a direct movement from tradition to modernity, but as a layered and negotiated process in which enduring cultural identities coexist with changing institutional and material realities (**Appadurai, 1996; Giddens, 1990; Lewis, 2011; Sen, 1999**). In doing so, the article contributes a contextually grounded perspective on how continuity and change interact in community life in coastal Bangladesh.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Study Design and Study Area

This study employed an exploratory mixed-methods case study design to examine social change, community identity, and local institutional transformation in Noakhali, Bangladesh. A mixed-methods approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand not only descriptive patterns in respondents' perceptions but also the contextual meanings attached to those patterns within specific social and institutional settings. Such designs are particularly useful when survey-based findings need to be interpreted alongside interview and documentary evidence, especially in small-scale community research where social processes cannot be adequately understood through a single method alone (**Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010**). The case study approach was adopted because the inquiry focused on a bounded local context

and aimed to generate analytically grounded insight rather than statistically generalizable conclusions (Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted in Noakhali District, Bangladesh, with particular attention to a localized community setting and two institutional contexts: Noakhali Government Girls' High School and Noakhali Municipality. Noakhali provides a relevant setting for the study of social transformation because it reflects the interaction of continuity and changes in a coastal Bangladeshi context shaped by educational expansion, local governance, mobility, infrastructural development, and evolving civic structures. The locality therefore offered an appropriate empirical context for examining how broader social transitions are experienced in everyday life and mediated through local institutions (Lewis, 2011; Yin, 2018).

## 2.2 Data Sources and Participants

The study drew on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through questionnaire-based surveys and semi-structured interviews, while secondary data included institutional documents, books, official publications, and other locally relevant documentary materials. The empirical evidence comprised four closely related components: a community identity survey, a community social-change survey, a school-based institutional inquiry, and a municipality-based institutional inquiry. These components were analytically integrated to examine social transformation through three linked dimensions: identity, everyday change, and institutional mediation.

The participant base therefore consisted of both community respondents and key institutional informants. The community-based evidence included two small purposively selected respondent groups from Noakhali. One group included 20 respondents aged 25 years and above and was primarily used to examine social and cultural identity. The second group included 20 respondents aged 30 years and above and focused on perceptions of social change over time. The institutional component included informants associated with Noakhali Government Girls' High School and Noakhali Municipality, selected because of their direct knowledge of institutional development, structure, and function. Purposive sampling was used throughout because the study prioritized contextual relevance and information richness over numerical representativeness, which is appropriate in exploratory case-oriented inquiry (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2015).

## 2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through structured questionnaire schedules and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire-based component was used to obtain descriptive information on respondent perceptions of local identity and changing social conditions. In the identity-focused survey, respondents were asked about birthplace, ancestral residence, language, food habits, dress patterns, religion, occupation, and participation in cultural or religious festivals. In the social-change-focused survey, respondents were asked to compare present conditions with earlier periods, especially in relation to transport, market organization, shelter systems, office arrangements, and educational practices. These items were intended to document perceived local change rather than measure abstract constructs through standardized scales.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for the institutional component. The school-related inquiry focused on historical development, infrastructure, academic organization, student support, staffing, extracurricular

activities, and the use of technology. The municipality-related inquiry addressed administrative structure, service responsibilities, sources of revenue, and civic functions. Semi-structured interviewing was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to guide discussion around core topics while still permitting detailed context-specific responses from informants (**Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015**). Secondary documents were used to supplement and contextualize the primary evidence, particularly in relation to institutional history and formal organizational functions. The use of multiple data sources improved interpretive depth and enabled triangulation across respondent perception, institutional narrative, and documentary evidence (**Bowen, 2009; Denzin, 1978**).

## 2.4 Analytical Domains

The available data were organized into three broad analytical domains. The first domain was community identity, which included birthplace, language, food habits, dress, religion, occupation, and festival participation as markers of social and cultural belonging. The second domain was perceived social transformation, which included respondent views on changes in transport, communication, market systems, shelter arrangements, educational practices, and civic infrastructure. The third domain was institutional mediation, which referred to the role of schools and municipalities in shaping social order, service delivery, civic participation, and adaptive local change.

This analytical structure was used to connect identity, everyday life, and institutional change within a single place-based interpretation. Such thematic organization is methodologically appropriate in exploratory case study research where multiple evidence streams are brought together to address a shared interpretive question (**Miles et al., 2020; Yin, 2018**).

## 2.5 Data Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed in complementary ways. The questionnaire-based data were processed descriptively, with attention to frequencies, percentages, and recurrent response patterns. Although the data were handled using SPSS, the present study does not employ inferential statistical claims because the sample sizes were small, the sampling strategy was non-probabilistic, and the research was exploratory in nature. Under these conditions, descriptive statistical treatment is more appropriate and methodologically defensible than hypothesis-testing approaches (**Field, 2018**).

The qualitative materials derived from interviews and documents were analyzed using thematic and content-oriented interpretation. Responses were reviewed repeatedly, grouped by topic, and interpreted in relation to the study's broader analytical framework. Rather than imposing an unnecessarily rigid coding structure on a modest local dataset, the analysis focused on identifying recurring themes, points of convergence, and meaningful contrasts across community and institutional sources. This approach is consistent with thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis in exploratory social research (**Braun & Clarke, 2021; Schreier, 2012**). The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was carried out through interpretive triangulation, allowing descriptive community-level patterns to be read alongside institutional narratives and documentary evidence (**Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015**).

## 2.6 Ethical Considerations and Study Limitations

Although the original study did not report a formal ethics approval procedure, the present manuscript follows basic principles of ethical social research. Participation is treated as voluntary, findings are presented in aggregate form for community respondents, and no unnecessary personal identifiers are disclosed. In the institutional component, emphasis is placed on official roles rather than personal detail unless role-specific identification is necessary for interpretation. In small-scale community studies, ethical adequacy depends largely on respect for participants, minimal risk, confidentiality where needed, and responsible representation of findings (Israel & Hay, 2006).

The study also has important methodological limitations. First, the respondent groups were small and purposively selected, which means the findings cannot be generalized statistically beyond the study context. Second, some of the evidence on social change relied on respondent recollection of past conditions, which introduces the possibility of recall bias. Third, institutional interviews may reflect official self-presentation and therefore require cautious interpretation. These limitations do not invalidate the study, but they do require that the findings be interpreted as exploratory, context-specific, and analytically suggestive rather than conclusive (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018).

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Community Identity and Cultural Continuity

The findings indicate that community identity in the study area remains strongly rooted in local history, language, religion, and everyday cultural practices. Among the respondents in the identity-focused survey, 50% reported that they themselves were born in Noakhali, while 75% stated that their ancestors were also from Noakhali. This pattern suggests that local identity is shaped not only by present residence but also by intergenerational belonging and inherited attachment to place. In sociological terms, such place-based continuity is important because community identity in South Asian settings is often reinforced through ancestry, local memory, and shared social experience rather than residence alone (Anderson, 2006; Hall, 1990; Lewis, 2011). The findings therefore support the broader argument that social transformation does not necessarily dissolve localized forms of belonging. Even where everyday life is changing, territorial identity and community attachment may remain durable (Appadurai, 1996; Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

Language emerged as one of the strongest markers of continuity. All respondents reported Bengali as their spoken language, indicating a highly stable linguistic identity within the study area. This is significant because language operates not merely as a medium of communication but also as a powerful symbol of cultural continuity and collective membership (Anderson, 2006; Hall, 1990). In the Bangladeshi context, Bengali identity is historically linked to nationalism, shared memory, and cultural belonging, and the persistence of Bengali as the common linguistic foundation of the community suggests that broader processes of modernization have not displaced the cultural core of local identity (Lewis, 2011; Sen, 1999).

Other everyday cultural indicators reinforce this pattern. The respondents reported rice as the principal staple food, commonly accompanied by fish, reflecting a dietary continuity closely associated with Bengali social life. Dress patterns also showed both continuity and modest change. Women commonly wore salwar-kameez and sari, while men wore shirts, lungis, and pants. However, the responses suggest a generational shift in women's

dress, with sari being more common around 30 years ago and salwar-kameez becoming more prevalent in the present period. This change should not be interpreted as cultural replacement. Rather, it reflects adaptive modification within a stable cultural framework, where convenience, mobility, and changing everyday norms influence dress practices without erasing cultural identity. Similarly, 95% of respondents identified as Muslim, and all respondents reported participation in both religious and national festivals. This indicates that religious affiliation remains strong while civic-cultural participation continues alongside it. Such layered belonging is consistent with the broader literature showing that identity in Bangladesh is simultaneously territorial, linguistic, religious, and civic (**Kabeer, 2000; Lewis, 2011**).

At the same time, the occupational profile indicates that continuity may coexist with persistent social inequality. The data show that 95% of female respondents were identified as housewives, with only a small share engaged in formal employment. Although the sample is small and localized, this result suggests that traditional gendered divisions of labor remain influential in the study area. This is important because national development narratives often emphasize educational expansion and women's empowerment, but such macro-level progress does not automatically translate into uniform transformation across all local social settings (**Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2009; Kabeer, 2000; UNESCO, 2023**). The Noakhali case therefore illustrates that continuity is not only cultural; it may also be institutional and gendered.

### 3.2 Perceived Changes in Everyday Social Life

While the identity-focused findings reveal strong continuity, the social-change data show that respondents perceive substantial transformation in the practical organization of everyday life. Respondents aged 30 years and above-described visible changes in office structures, teaching methods, transport systems, marketplace arrangements, and disaster preparedness over roughly the last three decades. These findings are based on retrospective perception rather than longitudinal measurement, but they remain useful because they reveal how local residents identify, remember, and interpret social change in their own environment (**Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018**).

One of the clearest examples of perceived transformation relates to office and court environments. According to 95% of respondents, office and court facilities around 30 years ago were characterized by tin-shed buildings, damaged furniture, and weak systems of record-keeping, whereas the present is associated with more durable structures, steel cabinets, computers, and improved office equipment. This finding reflects more than physical improvement. It suggests a broader process of bureaucratic consolidation and administrative modernization in which local institutions have become more materially organized and technologically equipped. In settings where the quality of everyday governance affects public confidence and access to services, changes in office infrastructure can significantly alter the public experience of institutional authority (**Castells, 2010; Scott, 1998**). The finding is also consistent with the broader literature on local governance in Bangladesh, which emphasizes the practical importance of administrative functionality at the local level (**Panday, 2011; Siddiqui, 2000**).

Educational change was another major theme. The data show that 85% of respondents believed teaching methods 30 years ago were largely based on one-way lecturing, memorization, and textbook dependence, whereas current teaching is seen as more practical, more technology-supported, and more responsive to

contemporary realities. This distinction is analytically important because it reflects not merely a change in classroom tools but a change in public perception of education itself. Respondents appear to associate present-day education with greater engagement, adaptability, and relevance. This aligns with wider debates on education reform in Bangladesh, where technology use, pedagogy, and access to more dynamic classroom environments have increasingly shaped public expectations of schooling (Asadullah & Yalonetzky, 2012; UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2023). At the same time, this perception should be treated cautiously. The presence of multimedia or practical methods does not automatically guarantee deeper learning outcomes, but it clearly signals that educational transformation is socially visible to the community.

Changes in transport and mobility were also widely emphasized. Around 70% of respondents reported that previous transport systems relied heavily on walking, bicycles, vans, low-mechanized transport, and boats, whereas the present is marked by battery-operated rickshaws, motorcycles, CNGs, buses, minibuses, and other faster forms of mobility. Transport transformation is socially significant because it influences access to work, education, healthcare, and markets, while also altering the pace and spatial reach of everyday life (Cohen, 2006; Montgomery, 2008; UN-Habitat, 2022). In a local context such as Noakhali, increased mobility can reduce isolation and strengthen integration with wider administrative and economic systems. The respondents largely interpreted such changes positively, emphasizing convenience, time saving, and accessibility. This positive perception is understandable, though transport modernization may also have unequal benefits depending on income, geography, and access to infrastructure (World Bank, 2023).

Market organization presents another revealing case of perceived transformation. According to 85% of respondents, earlier hat-bazar systems were more loosely arranged, whereas the present is associated with more fixed marketplaces organized by designated place and time. This suggests a shift from relatively informal commercial patterns toward more structured and predictable spatial-economic organization. Markets are not only centers of exchange; they are also social institutions through which mobility, pricing, local order, and economic visibility are coordinated. Greater organization in market systems may therefore reflect broader institutional change linked to improved transport, municipal oversight, and population concentration (Scott, 1998; Satterthwaite, 2007). The findings imply that residents interpret market regularization as part of wider social modernization rather than as an isolated administrative change.

The findings on disaster preparedness are particularly important in the context of coastal Bangladesh. Approximately 80% of respondents believed that 30 years ago disasters would have caused greater loss because of inadequate warning systems, weaker awareness, and insufficient shelter facilities, whereas the present is associated with improved warning dissemination, greater public awareness, and better access to shelter. This pattern closely matches the wider Bangladeshi experience of disaster risk reduction, where improvements in early warning, community response, and institutional preparedness have substantially reduced mortality and vulnerability in many coastal regions (Ahmed et al., 2016; Alam & Dominey-Howes, 2015; IPCC, 2022; UNDRR, 2022). The Noakhali findings suggest that such improvements are not merely policy-level claims; they are visible enough to be recognized within community memory. This supports the argument that resilience in coastal Bangladesh is increasingly institutional as well as social (Islam & Walkerden, 2014; Mallick & Vogt, 2014).

Taken together, these findings reveal a dual pattern. Cultural identity remains strongly rooted in language,

religion, food habits, and local belonging, while the organizational and material conditions of everyday life are perceived to have changed substantially. This combination supports the central argument of the paper: social transformation in Noakhali is not best understood as the disappearance of tradition, but as a layered process in which visible modernization unfolds within durable cultural frameworks (**Appadurai, 1996; Giddens, 1990; Inglehart & Baker, 2000**).

### 3.3 The Role of Educational Institutions in Social Transformation

The institutional evidence from Noakhali Government Girls' High School adds an important dimension to the analysis by showing how educational institutions mediate social change in practice. The school emerges in the data not merely as a site of classroom instruction but as a historically embedded institution linked to girls' education, social discipline, technological adaptation, and civic formation. According to the source material, the current school developed through a longer process of educational transition and institutional reorganization, eventually taking its present form in 1963. Whether every historical detail requires further documentary validation is less important here than the broader institutional pattern: the school has evolved in response to changing local needs and now represents a significant educational structure in the area.

The present infrastructure of the school indicates substantial institutional development. The data report five buildings, 17 classrooms, four multimedia classrooms, one ICT laboratory, three science laboratories, one library room, and one auditorium. The school also reportedly had 46 working teachers, 24 branches across classes 5 to 10, and an enrollment of 1,641 students in 2024. These details are significant because they demonstrate that the institution is not operating at a minimal or symbolic level; it represents a relatively organized educational environment with both conventional and technology-supported facilities. In the broader Bangladeshi context, such institutional features reflect the expansion of educational infrastructure and the growing importance of digitally supported teaching, science education, and structured academic administration (**Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2009; UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2023**).

The school-related findings also indicate that education functions as a mechanism of socialization and civic development. The data refer to extracurricular and co-curricular activities such as Girl Guides, Red Crescent activities, cleanliness committees, debate participation, science fairs, awareness seminars, first-aid training, and national-day observances. These activities suggest that the school contributes not only to academic performance but also to the development of discipline, responsibility, civic engagement, and public participation. This interpretation is consistent with sociological understandings of schools as institutions that transmit norms, aspirations, and socially valued forms of conduct (**Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Durkheim, 1956**). In this sense, the school appears to function as an intermediary between continuity and change: it preserves order, discipline, and institutional legitimacy while simultaneously incorporating digital tools, broader participation, and modern educational expectations.

The role of a well-established girls' school is particularly important. In Bangladesh, female educational advancement has been one of the most visible dimensions of social transformation, yet local outcomes remain uneven and mediated by class, geography, and community norms (**Asadullah & Yalonetzky, 2012; Kabeer, 2000**). The findings suggest that Noakhali Government Girls' High School represents a local institutional

expression of this broader shift, supporting girls' education in a more structured, resource-equipped, and socially visible form. At the same time, the evidence should be interpreted cautiously because it reflects institution-centered reporting and does not include direct perspectives from students or parents. Even so, the available information strongly supports the conclusion that educational institutions are central to the way social transformation is organized and reproduced at the local level.

### 3.4 Municipality and Local Governance as Agents of Change

The municipality-based findings further demonstrate that local institutional change is central to the transformation of everyday social life. According to the data, Noakhali Municipality was established in 1876, covers 16.66 square kilometers, and consists of nine wards. The municipality was also reported to have a population of 107,654 in 2011 and to carry responsibility for a wide range of civic, infrastructural, and administrative functions. Whether all of these figures remain fully updated is less important than the institutional significance of the municipality itself. The findings clearly show that the municipality operates as a key local state structure through which roads, sanitation, markets, lighting, environmental management, registration, and public services are coordinated.

The organizational structure described by municipal informants indicates a relatively differentiated local administrative system. The mayor was identified as the head of the municipality, while administrative, engineering, and health-related responsibilities were distributed across designated officials and divisions. This reflects the broader functional logic of urban local government in Bangladesh, where municipalities serve as frontline institutions of local service delivery and civic coordination (**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2009; Panday, 2011; Siddiqui, 2000**). From an analytical perspective, this matters because local governance is experienced not as a distant abstraction but through concrete services and infrastructural arrangements that shape daily life.

The data on municipal income and expenditure further illustrate this point. Municipal revenue reportedly comes from sources such as land-related fees, hat-bazar leases, holding taxes, trade licenses, certificates, house construction approval, water fees, vehicle fees, and shop rent or allocation. Municipal expenditure includes salaries, honoraria, utilities, educational assistance, poverty alleviation, sports and cultural activities, mosquito control, relief distribution, tree planting, roads, culverts, terminals, water supply, and street lighting. These categories show that the municipality is not merely a regulatory body. It is simultaneously a fiscal, developmental, welfare-related, and infrastructural institution embedded in the reproduction of urban order. This interpretation is consistent with studies showing that local government in Bangladesh plays a critical role in connecting administrative power with everyday material conditions (**Panday, 2011; Siddiqui, 2000**).

The municipality findings are especially relevant in relation to adaptation and environmental management. The reported inclusion of street lighting, community policing, climate-resilient infrastructure, tree planting, and pond excavation suggests that local governance is responding not only to administrative demand but also to environmental vulnerability and the need for safer public spaces. In coastal Bangladesh, such institutional adaptation is highly significant because local development is closely tied to resilience, climate sensitivity, and public preparedness (**Ahsan & Warner, 2014; Ahmed et al., 2016; IPCC, 2022**). The Noakhali case therefore

indicates that local governance is one of the practical mechanisms through which broader social transformation becomes materially organized and publicly visible.

An additional point concerns citizen responsibility. The municipality-related data emphasize that local residents also have obligations, including paying taxes on time, disposing of waste properly, and complying with building and cleanliness regulations. This reflects a relational model of governance in which institutional effectiveness depends partly on reciprocal civic participation. Such a view aligns with social capital and governance scholarship, which argues that institutions function more effectively when public cooperation, trust, and rule compliance reinforce administrative capacity (Evans, 1996; Ostrom, 1990; Putnam, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). The findings therefore suggest that local social transformation is not produced by institutions alone; it is negotiated between institutions and citizens within everyday civic life.

### 3.5 Synthesis of Findings

When the community and institutional findings are considered together, a coherent interpretive picture emerges. At the community level, respondents describe strong continuity in language, religion, food habits, and place-based belonging, alongside substantial change in transport, office environments, market organization, educational practices, and disaster preparedness. At the institutional level, the school and municipality appear as concrete organizational arenas through which these wider changes are made durable and socially meaningful. The school mediates educational modernization, discipline, and female opportunity, while the municipality mediates civic infrastructure, public service, and environmental adaptation. Social transformation in Noakhali therefore appears neither wholly traditional nor wholly modern. Instead, it reflects a negotiated and layered process in which enduring cultural identities coexist with evolving institutional and material realities (Appadurai, 1996; Giddens, 1990; Lewis, 2011; Sen, 1999).

These findings should, however, be interpreted with appropriate caution. The evidence is based on small purposively selected samples and a limited number of institutional informants, which restricts broad generalization. In addition, several findings on past social conditions rely on retrospective perception, and some historical or institutional details would benefit from stronger documentary verification. Accordingly, the study does not claim statistical representativeness or causal explanation. Its value lies instead in offering a contextually grounded account of how social change is perceived and negotiated within one local setting in Noakhali, and how selected local institutions reflect and mediate that process. Even with its limitations, the study contributes to understanding how continuity and change interact in community life in coastal Bangladesh.

## 4. Conclusions

This study examined social transformation in Noakhali, Bangladesh, through the interconnected dimensions of community identity, everyday social practice, and local institutional change. The findings indicate that change in the study area is best understood as a layered and negotiated process rather than a simple transition from tradition to modernity. Respondents reported visible transformations in transportation, office environments, market organization, educational practices, and disaster preparedness, reflecting substantial change in the material and organizational conditions of daily life. At the same time, strong continuity remained in language,

religion, food habits, and place-based belonging, suggesting that local identity continues to be shaped by enduring cultural and social foundations. The study further shows that institutions such as Noakhali Government Girls' High School and Noakhali Municipality play important mediating roles in this process by organizing education, civic services, social discipline, and local adaptation. Although the findings are based on small purposively selected samples and therefore cannot claim statistical generalizability, the study provides a contextually grounded account of how one local community in Noakhali experiences and interprets social transformation.

## 5. Recommendation

Based on the findings, future local development efforts should place greater emphasis on strengthening institutions that help communities adapt to social change while preserving positive elements of local identity. Educational institutions should continue expanding technology-supported learning, co-curricular engagement, civic awareness activities, and inclusive student development initiatives. Local government bodies should further improve service delivery, waste management, transport organization, environmental management, and disaster preparedness systems in ways that are responsive to community needs. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples, include comparative local settings, and employ stronger documentary and longitudinal evidence to validate perceived patterns of change. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how continuity, modernization, and institutional change interact across different local settings in Bangladesh.

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## Author Contribution

The authors were involved in the creation of the study design, data analysis, and execution stages. Every writer gave their consent after seeing the final work.

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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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