

## Cross-Cultural Comparison of Marriage Relationship between Muslim and Santal Communities in Rural Bangladesh

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## Abstract

Marriage is a universal social institution through which an adult male and an adult female usually involves in marriage relationship and may perpetuate it to meet their reciprocal sexual, emotional, and material needs across the marital life cycle. Relevant literatures reviewed suggested that most of the studies on marriage relationship between Muslim and Santal communities in Bangladesh were culture-specific. In order to fulfill the knowledge gap purpose of the study was to explore and compare marriage relationship, including marital bond development, sexual behavior, and role relationship between Muslim and Santal communities in rural Bangladesh. For this research purpose 100 couples (70 couples for the Muslim and 30 couples for the Santal) out of 380 couples were randomly selected by cluster sampling procedure from the Kalna village situated in the Tanore Upazila of Rajshahi district, Bangladesh. In so doing in-depth interview method with semi-structural questionnaire: Open and close-ended questions was applied for necessary data collection. The collected data were analyzed by Independent Sample T-test to compare marriage relationship, especially marital bond development, marital sexual behavior and marital role relationship between the communities' couples. The results of the Independent Sample t test showed that there were significant differences in age at marriage for women, sexual frequency, and role relationships among the couples selected between the communities in rural Bangladesh. This study recommends that further cross-cultural research should be done on marital power relationship and marital adjustment across the couples' life cycle between the two ethnic communities in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Marriage relationship, Muslim, Santal, Bangladesh

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# Cross-Cultural Comparison of Marriage Relationship between Muslim and Santal Communities in Rural Bangladesh

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Keywords: Marriage Relationship, Muslim, Santal, Bangladesh.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage relationship is one of the fundamental aspects of human relationships. According to Dyer (1983), marriage relationship refers to dyadic relationships between husband and wife defined by the status and role of "wife" in reciprocity with the status and role of "husband". Marriage is a universal social institution (United Nations 1988, 1990) through which an adult male and an adult female, generally acquire new statuses, husband and wife. The statuses the husband and wife acquires goes through from institution to companionship, that may endure and sustain in their life cycle (Burgess and Locke 1945), they play reciprocal roles to meet their material, sexual, emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs for their survival.

Actually, the companionship in the marriage relationship develops between a man and a woman is based on their purely interpersonal trust, dependency, competence, mutuality, complement, love, sympathy, touch, fellow-feeling, obligation, commitment, evaluation, regard, self-exposure etc. that create unity and integrity in diverse beliefs, values, norms, attitudes of the persons, who involve in that relationship (Zimbardo and Ruch 1980; Schneider 1976; Yorburg 1993; Foster 1960; Powell 1983). In addition, this relationship has both positive and negative sides: the former creates and develops self-esteem, satisfactions, regard, security, sense of integrity and capacity of adjustment, and the latter develops anxiety, stress, embarrassment, insecurity, aggression and even violence within and between partners,

depending on how they relate to each other, how to behave to each other, how to consciously deal with conflict, misunderstanding and resolution, how much extent their interpersonal needs fulfill and the wishes to continue or discontinue the relationship.

Marriage relationship is a universal pattern of human relationship that exists in every culture or subculture around the world. Social scientists argue that it is universal, because most cultures prefer sex in marital context, and it legitimizes the children generated by marital tie. In addition, the social, emotional, material and protective supports the marital relationship provides for its members, especially for husband and wife and their dependent children and other members, other relationships cannot. Without these supports human generation cannot continue and survive on the earth and socio-economic and cultural progression and transmission cannot occur into the next generation and human civilization may extinct (Murdock 1960). So, human relationship experts always try to explore and examine marriage relationship in world cultures. In this respect cultural and cross-cultural oriented sociologist, anthropologist, psychologist and other behavioral scientists argue that the marriage relationship is unique in every culture and that relationship is culturally constructed and socially recognized in every society (Bernard 1973; Johnson 1976; Murdock 1960; Stephens 1963; Sills 1968; Schulz 1972).

Every marriage relationship begins at the time when an adult man and an adult woman becomes a couple recognized by community cultural norms. But community cultural norms vary enormously because of diversity of beliefs, values, and attitudes toward age at marriage for both male and female all over the world (United Nations 1988, 1990). A great deal of systematic cross-cultural data indicates that developed and highly urbanized societies prefer delayed age at marriage for both male and female, while developing and under developed societies expect earlier age at marriage for ones. In addition, most of the studies indicate that there are marked differences in age between husband and wife in their marital tie: men are likely to be older than women (Buss 1988, 1989; Baron and Byrne 1995; Harpending 1992; United Nations 1988a, 1990b).

After marriage a couple involves in marital sexual behavior. But sexual behavior also depends on the communities' cultural values, norms, attitudes and norms that the couples hold. Cross-cultural studies generalize that there are two types of attitudes toward sexual behavior: one is conservative and the other is permissive. In some permissive cultures, such as European and Western cultures, premarital and extramarital sex or homosexuality outside the marital tie is accepted, but other cultures, such as Arabian Muslims and the Philippines, strictly condemn these patterns of sexual behavior and approve the sexual behavior only within marital ties. Cross-cultural studies also reveal that there is a universal belief that the marital relationship provides the preferred context for satisfactory sexual relationship (Davenport 1987; Frayser 1985; McAnulty and Burnette 2001; Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb 1998).

After marriage every couple not only consumes marital sex for sexual satisfaction and reproduction, but also involves in role relationship to meet material and social needs according to their cultural patterns. Mead (1952) uncovers cross-cultural variations in

marriage role relationship between husband and wife in the three tribes: the Arapesh, the Mundugumor, and the Tchambuli. According to her, both husband and wife of the Arapesh are gentle, passive, warm, non-competitive, are equally likely to initiate sexual relations and equally responsible for the care of their children. Among the Mundugumor both husband and wife are competitive, independent, violent, and cannibalistic. Members of both the sexes are expected to be aggressive in their sexual encounters and equally jealous and vengeful. They dislike pregnancy and breast feeding and are not tender toward their daughters. The wives lack any traits stereotypically seen as feminine. In the Tchambuli, husband and wife play opposed roles: husbands are “feminine” and wives are “masculine.” Wood and Eagly (2002) compare the behavior of husband and wife in relation to differentiation, uniformity, specialization, consistency in non-industrial societies and find that role relationships between men and women across the societies are culture-bound influenced by the environment.

Historically, marriage in Bangladesh is an important institution which performs many functions and plays many important roles for human development and adjustment across the generations like many other developing and under-developing cultures. The relevant studies reveal that the marriage institution is shaped by a patriarchal system through which the marital tie between a male and a female is developed. Without marriage men and women cannot, generally, engage in sex and cannot maintain their intimate sexual and other relations (Aziz 1979; Alam 1995; Maloney, Aziz and Sarker 1981; Naher 1985; Sarker 1997; Uddin 2006). In addition, it also makes legitimate children born, including their social, material, emotional and psychological supports for proper human development. For this basic purpose, most of the parents in rural areas of this country expect early age at marriage, especially for their daughters to keep their virginity, because men prefer virginity for women and to provide minimum amount of dowry for their marriage. Sexually, women have no wishes; rather they are the object of men’s sexual desire. After marriage every woman goes to her husband’s house or husband’s father’s house, where she is a subordinate and dependent member of the family. Although married women play many roles as a housewife and work from dawn to dusk, there have fewer values for their contributions to the family, especially to her husband (Aziz 1979; Aziz and Maloney 1985; Sarker 1997).

Although marriage is an important aspect of social relationships in Bangladesh, there are few studies comparing differences among ethnic groups in the country. Aziz (1979) compares kinship relationships between Muslim and Hindu communities. Naher (1985) examines marriage practices between the Muslim and Christian communities. Sarker (1997) compares fertility behavior in relation to social structure between Hindu and Muslim communities in rural Bangladesh. Although the above-mentioned studies contribute to some extent to marriage studies in Bangladesh, there are no cross-cultural data on marriage relationship between Muslim and Santal communities in rural Bangladesh (Uddin 2006). Therefore, the present study examines and compares the marriage relationship, focusing on marital bond development, sexual behavior, and marital role relationship between Muslim and Santal communities in rural Bangladesh. These cross-cultural data on marriage relationship between Muslim and Santal communities in rural Bangladesh may contribute to social sciences and world cultures.

## 2. COMMUNITY CULTURAL BACKGROUND AND MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

Bangladesh is an agrarian economy and village based country where various religious and ethnic communities, such as Muslim and Santal, live side by side. The Muslim community is the major dominant religious community. Bangladeshi Muslims are a mixture of different physical stocks. They speak Bengali language with a mixture of Arabic-Urdu preference. Religiously, they believe in Islam which includes the oneness of God or Monotheism (*Tawhid*), Holy Qur'an as His Divine laws and principles, Muhammad as His nominated last Prophet and his *Hadith (Sunnah)* as practices of sayings. A man who believes in Monotheism, Qur'an and Hadith is called Muslim (Levy 1963; Alam 1995; Sarker 1997). On the other hand, the Santal community is the largest tribal group of Aborigines. Racially, they belong to Proto-Australoid stocks and speak in Austric-Mundary, although Bengali is also spoken. They believe in several *Bongas*. A man who believes in Bongas is called a Santal. The Santal in Bangladesh believe in animism, which includes worship of nature (Ali 1998; Sultana 2003). These fundamental belief systems of the communities may influence their respective marriage relationships in rural Bangladesh context.

### *Marriage Norms and Age at Marriage*

Traditionally, conjugal life in Bangladesh begins when respective parents or elder members arrange marriage between a man and a woman according to their communities' norms. The marriage relationship between them is a relatively enduring relationship involving in economic cooperation, and allowing exclusive sexual relationship leading to child bearing and rearing. Both the Muslim and Santal communities are patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal in nature. Although both cultures permit polygyny, sororate and levirate, and widow or widower' remarriage, they widely practice monogamy or serial monogamy. The Muslims practice more polygyny than the Santals, because Islamic rules or Sunna, guide Muslim males to take up to four wives at a time (Madani 1993; Sarker 1997). Both communities follow endogamy, and exogamy; the Muslims are religiously endogamous and class, lineage exogamous, but the Santals are tribal endogamous and clan exogamous (Ali 1998). Although both communities prefer contracted marriage, the Santal practice romantic marriage more frequently than the Muslims one. According to Islamic rules before marriage an adult male and female cannot meet together, because it is sinful (Sarker 1997; Aziz 1979). Studies reveal that the Muslims prefer delayed age at marriage for males and early age at marriage for females, while the Santals expect earlier age at marriage for both males and females due to socio-economic reasons (Kayes 1995; Uddin 2006).

### *Sexual Norms and Sexual Behavior*

Sexual behavior depends on community cultural norms. In Muslim culture, sexual behavior is only confined to marital tie and other patterns of sexual behavior, such as premarital, extramarital and homosexuality are religiously forbidden (Maloney, Aziz and Sarker 1981). After puberty, adult men and women in the Muslim culture maintain their life separately; they cannot see each other; they cannot interact with

each other. Both men and women are expected to be virgins until their wedding (Aziz and Maloney 1985). On the other hand, Santal culture is more flexible regarding this behavior. Some studies show that both men and women of the Santal jointly participate in their social, economic and religious activities and interact with each other freely and independently, so the men and women of the Santal engage in oral sex to some extent and prefer romantic marriage, although kissing and physical intercourse between them is obligatory (Ali 1998; Kayes 1995; Uddin 2006)).

### ***Economic Status and Family Role Distribution***

In rural Bangladesh, about 76% of the population lives in subsistence economy in which most of the people are in poverty. Minority groups such as, the Santal, are the poorest of the poor. One report indicates that 53% of rural people are poor and there are 55 million food insecure households and 62% adults are illiterate (World Bank 2000:3). Although the main occupation of the rural villagers is agriculture, man-land ratio is very low and many of people are landless or near the landless due to laws of inheritance, land fragmentation and over-population. Some reports indicate that about 62% of the rural households are functionally landless (World Bank 2000; Toufique and Turton 2002).

The division of labor between men and women, especially adult men and women varies enormously between the Muslim and Santal communities. Both Santal adult men and women take part in agriculture as manual laborers and work outside the family from dawn to dusk as laborers (Ali 1998). On the other hand, division of labor between adult men and women in Muslim community is strictly maintained according to sex norms. The Muslims think adult men are only breadwinner of the family. So the Muslim men have to work in the agricultural field and other economic sectors. Generally, Muslim women do not work in the agricultural field and do not go outside the family alone. Their main functions as women are to bear and rear children, maintain family chores, serve family members, although women in the lower class families work outside the family under economic pressure for family maintenance (Abdulla and Zeidenstain 1982; Afsaruddin 1990; Jansen 1999). Sarker (1997) and others indicate that majority of the Muslim women in Bangladesh are not only poor and are confined within the four walls in the household, but also depend on the three pillars of social supports: father, husband and son for their survival. The previous studies assume that culture in every society or subculture within the given society influences marriage relationships. Based on the assumption this cross-cultural study also assumes that the Muslim and Santal cultural patterns in Bangladesh influence their marriage relationship between husband and wife. The specific assumptions drawn in this study are as follows:

1. Santal culture prefers earlier age at marriage than the Muslim culture in rural Bangladesh; Duration of marital life of the Muslim couples is higher than that of the Santal couples.
2. Frequency of sexual intercourse among the Muslim couples is higher than that among the Santal couples.

3. Role differentiation and specialization between husband and wife in the Muslim culture is greater than that in the Santal culture. Wives in the Muslim culture are socio-economically more dependent on their husbands than the wives in the Santal culture. Interdependency between Santal husbands and wives is higher than that of Muslim husbands and wives. Although the husbands of both the cultures are more competitive than the wives, the wives of the Santal culture are more competitive than the wives of Muslim culture. Wives' roles of both the cultures are more consistent than the roles of husbands'.

### 3. DATA AND METHODS

#### *Participants*

Field work was conducted from January to June, 2005. The village Kalna, situated in the Talonda union of Tanore Upazila of Rajshahi district, was purposefully selected for this study because two distinct cultural communities, Muslim and Santal, were living side by side as neighbors in the same geographical setting. In this village there were about 380 families: 300 families were Muslim and the rest were Santal. In order to compare marriage relationships, two separate sampling units of the communities were developed: one for Muslims and another for Santals. Each community was considered as a cluster and each couple of both the cluster communities was counted for as a study unit. In order to create homogeneity of marriage relationship: Marital bond development, sexual behavior and role relationship among samples 70 (24%) families of the Muslim cluster community and 30 (36%) families of the Santal cluster community were selected through cluster random sampling, where both husband and wife of both the sample couples were actively participated in the study.

The selected couples of both the communities participated in the study, age ranged from 15 to 50, although most of them were in middle age. Most of the couples lived in a nuclear family (95% for Muslim and 80% for Santal) and the rest of them were in extended families. Although the main occupation of the respondents was cultivation, most of them had no land property (30% for Muslim and 86% for Santal) and the rest of them were marginal farmers. Although the main occupation in the study village was agriculture, 66% of the Muslim husbands and 14% of the Santal husbands engaged in farming. The rest of them adopted other occupations, such as petty trade, day laboring (7% for Muslim and 85% for Santal). In education most of the respondents were totally illiterate. Some of them completed primary and secondary education. In yearly family income, most of the families earned from 10 to 20 thousands TK. (31% for Muslim and 80% for Santal); 27% of the Muslim and 16% of the Santal earned 21-30 thousands TK., and about 40% of the Muslim and 3% of the Santal families were 31-50 and above thousand. Family income of the Muslim families was higher than that of the Santal families.

#### *Definition and Measures*

Marriage relationship in this study was the main concept that was classified into three sub-concepts: Marital bond development, sexual behavior and role relationship. These



sub-concepts were defined and measured at nominal, ordinal and interval scale. The development of the marital bond was measured by *age at marriage* for husband and wife and by *duration of marriage*. Measures of sexual behavior included *sexual frequency* (number of intercourse in the prior month) and *sexual satisfaction* as rated by a) the husband only, b) the wife only, and c) both of the partners. Variables subsumed by the role relationship included *differentiation* (the functional specialized behavior of the husband and wife according to age and sex norms in the family and assessed as high or low); *specialization* (amount and number of types of particular, differentiated behavior engaged by husband and wife in the family affairs, coded as high or low); *dependency* (the reliance on the other for assistance, nurturing, comfort, existence or level of functioning, coded as husband, wife, or none); *independence* (self-reliance of husband and wife in the family, categorized as husband, wife, both; *interdependence* (reciprocal fellow feelings, mutual understanding and economic, social, emotional supports, which endure and sustain relationships between husband and wife, coded as high or low; *cooperation* (the joint activities of the husband and wife to promote common interests or shared goals in the family assessed as husband or wife; *competition* (as situations in which husband and wife struggle with one another to attain the same goal, assessed as husband or wife; and *consistency* (the obligations that play smoothly in various situations, coded as husband, wife, both, or neither).

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

The study design was a semi-structural questionnaire with open and close-ended questions on the marital bond development (age at marriage for both husband and wife and their marital duration), sexual behavior (sexual frequency) and role relationship (role differentiation, specialization, dependency, independence, interdependency, cooperation, competition and consistency) followed *Family Measurement in India* edited by S. Bharat (1996) and other research instruments (Uddin 2006). The questionnaire was pre-tested before real raw data collection and necessary adjustments were made. In order to collect data on the variables of marriage relationship interview and case study technique with the questionnaire schedule was used. The author and one female data collector were engaged in data collection. In so doing they built up rapport with the respondents of the communities' samples to create consciousness about the research purposes and objectives in which they participated fully in the research process and responded really on the research indicators. Up to 1 month of the data collection period were used to build up rapport with the respondents and 5 months were used for data collection with the questionnaire and case study method. According to our central research objective, including assumptions, the collected data were analyzed by descriptive statistics, focusing frequency distribution on the marriage relationship: Marital bond development, sexual behavior and role relationship among the couples between the Muslim and Santal communities and then significance test, especially *Independent Sample T Test* was applied to explore differences on the examined variables between the communities. The analysis of collected data was carried out by SPSS procedures for descriptive statistics, and independent sample t-tests. Results on the variables were presented by cross-tabulation, although the results of socio-cultural background factors of the samples were not analyzed and tabulated.

## 4. RESULTS

### *Marital Bond Development*

Tables 1, 2 and 3 present data on age at marriage for husband and wife, and duration of marriage for both the communities. Table 1 show that age at marriage for family formation for the Santal husband and wife was earlier than that for the Muslim ones. That is average age at marriage for the Muslim husband was 22.92 years (SD=6.99), while the Santal husbands' was 20.67 years (SD=5.99) respectively. The same is true for women (see table 2); mean age at marriage of the Muslim women was 15.05 years (SD= 3.45) compared to the Santal women married 14.13 years (SD= 4.45). While 13.33% of the Santal men married prior to the age of 14, none of the Muslim men did so. A higher percentage of Santal women married prior to age ten (26.67%) than Muslim women (4.29%). The majority of the couples in both communities formed family between the ages 15 and 29 (92.85% for Muslim males and 87.14% for Muslim females, 76.67% for Santal males and 63.34% for Santal females respectively). Table 3 show that duration of marriage life was longer for Muslim couples than that for Santal couples (14.32 years versus 11.90 years, respectively). The results of Independent Sample t-test suggest that mean age at marriage for the Muslim husband and women compared to the Santal husband and wife, including marital duration was higher, only age at marriage for the women was significantly different between the two communities (F=3.67, P-value=0.05, t=1.12, df=98, P-value=0.26) at 0.05 level.

*Table 1. Frequency of Age at Marriage for Husband*

Age at Marriage for Husband in Year	Muslim		Santal	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Under 14	-	-	4	13.33
15-19	20	28.57	10	33.33
20-24	32	45.71	11	36.67
25-29	13	18.57	2	6.67
30-34	2	2.86	2	6.67
35 and above	3	4.29	1	3.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

M (Muslim N=70) S (Santal N=30), Independent t test, Mean=22.92 and SD= 6.99 for M, Mean=20.67 and SD=5.99 for S (F=0.19, P-value=0.65, T=1.55, df=98, P-value=0.12) \*P>0.05 level

*Table 2. Frequency of Age at Marriage for Wife*

Age at Marriage for Wife in Year	Muslim		Santal	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Under 10	3	4.29	8	26.67
11-14	28	40.00	8	26.67
15-19	33	47.14	11	36.67
20-24	4	5.71	2	6.67
25 and Above	2	2.86	1	3.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

M (Muslim, N=70) S (Santal, N=30), Independent t test, Mean=15.05 and SD=3.45 for M, Mean=14.13 and SD=4.45 for S (F=3.67, P-value=0.05, t=1.12, df=98, P-value=0.26) \*P<0.05 level

*Table 3. Frequency of Duration of Marital Life*

Duration of Marital Life	Muslim		Santal	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1-5	7	10.00	8	26.66
6-10	23	32.86	12	40.00
11-15	16	22.86	-	-
16-20	7	10.00	5	16.67
21 and Above	17	24.28	5	16.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

M (Muslim, N=70) S (Santal, N=30), Independent t test, Mean=14.32(SD=9.07) for M, Mean=11.9(SD=9.02) for S (F=0.16, P-value=0.68, T=1.22, df=98, P-value=0.22) \*P>0.05 level

A Muslim couple commented: “We think every adult male and female should marry an ideal age at which we can enjoy our life. If we marry earlier or latter in, we face many problems, such as sex, child rearing etc. so we have done better to marry at age as we did.” On the other hand, a Santal couple aged 38 for husband and 30 for wife said: “Our parents married us 20 years ago. We live in hardship with our six siblings: two sons and four daughters due to early age at marriage. Now we think we should marry at reasonable age, such as 25 for male and 20 for female.”

### *Sexual Behavior*

The frequency of sexual intercourse between husband and wife depends on how many years they have been married. At the beginning of a marital life the rate of intercourse may be high. But usually decreases as the marital life continues and progresses. Tables 4 and 5 present data on sexual behavior and sexual satisfaction. Average intercourse among the Muslim couples was 11.42 times/month (SD=5.51) compared to the Santal couples, 8.70 times/month (SD= 3.45). With this sexual behavior one couple may be satisfied, while other may not, as sexual satisfaction is a relative matter. Table 5 indicates that most of the couples of both the samples are sexually satisfied with their partners (47.14% for Muslim and 46.67% for Santal), but husband’s satisfaction in the Muslim sample is higher (22.86%) than in the Santal sample (16.67%). On the other hand, wife’s sexual satisfaction in the Santal sample is higher (36.66%) than in the Muslim sample (30%). The results of an Independent Sample t-test suggest that frequency of intercourse is significantly different (F=6.67, P-value=0.01, t=2.50, df=98, P-value=0.01) and sexual satisfaction was similar (F=6.67, P-value=0.01, t=2.50, df=98, P-value=0.01) at 0.05 level between the two communities.

*Table 4. Frequency of Intercourse between Husband and Wife in a Month*

Number of Intercourse in a Month	Muslim		Santal	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1-5	13	18.57	7	23.33
6-10	18	25.71	15	50.00
11-15	26	37.14	8	26.67
16-20	11	15.71	-	-
21 and Above	2	2.87	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

M (Muslim, N=70) S (Santal, N=30), Independent t test Mean=11.42 (SD= 5.51) for M and Mean=8.70 (SD=3.45) for S (F=6.67, P-value=0.01, t=2.50, df=98, P-value=0.01) \*P<0.05 level

*Table 5. Frequency of Sexual Satisfaction by Husband and Wife*

Who is satisfied?	Muslim		Santal	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Husband only	16	22.86	5	16.67
Wife only	21	30.00	11	36.66
Both of them	33	47.14	14	46.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

M (Muslim, N=70) S (Santal, N=30), Independent t test Mean=2.24(SD=0.8) for M and Mean=2.30(SD=.74) for S (F=0.59, P-value=0.44, t=-0.33, df=98, P-value=0.74) \*P>0.05 level

A Muslim husband reported: “Take hot food, such as cow’s meet, milk and vegetables daily, but my wife do not consume and she becomes ill around the year. So she cannot intercourse with me daily.” On the other hand, a Santal woman stated: “We are poor and we work daily for livelihood outside the family at day time and come home at evening. When I feel sex at night, my husband is asleep. So I feel dissatisfied in sex with my male partner.”

### *Marriage Role Relationship*

Table 6 (next page) shows data on role relationship between husband and wife between the communities. Role differentiation between husband and wife is higher in the Muslim sample (80% high) than in the Santal sample (33.33% high). In economic and political activities Muslim men were more specialized and Muslim woman were more involved in child bearing, rearing and household activities (90% high), but both the Santal men and women shared in those areas with each other (30% high). As wives of the Muslim were specialized in the child rearing and emotional activities, so they were economically dependent on their husbands to meet material needs. In the Muslim sample about 90% of the wives were dependent, but the husbands were economically and socially independent (92.86%). On the other hand, both husband and wife of the Santal sample were economically independent from each other. Interdependence between Muslim husbands and wives was 7.14% for high, whereas interdependence between Santal husbands and wives was higher 100% or high. Wives of both the communities were more cooperative (88.57% for Muslim and 80.00% for Santal), but the husbands of both cultures were more competitive (90% for Muslim and 76.67% for Santal). The roles assigned on the husbands and wives, the wives of both the communities consistently played than the husbands (77.14% for Muslim and 70% for Santal). Role consistency of the husband was 18.57% for the Muslim, and 23.33% for the Santal. The results of Independent Sample t-test in table 7 suggest that role relationship between husband and wife was significantly different between the Muslim and Santal communities ( $p < 0.05$ ).

A Muslim woman aged 40, occupation house wife said: “I socialize from my parents that women should confine within the house and should not go out the family for work for livelihood. Muslim women should work household chores, child bearing and rearing, services for husband and other elderly members in the family and women should always co-operate husband.” A Santal woman aged 38, occupation housewife and day laborer opined: “As we are poor, I work all day long for earning out side the home. In addition to I also maintain household chores, child rearing, and sometimes marketing. In these activities, my husband sometimes shares with me.”

*Table 6. Frequency of Marriage Role Relationship between Husband and Wife*

Marriage Role Relationship	Muslim		Santal	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
<b>1. How much extent role differentiates between husband and wife?</b>				
High	56	80.00	10	33.33
Low	14	20.00	20	66.67
Total	<b>70</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>2. How much extent role specializes between husband and wife?</b>				
High	63	90.00	9	30.00
Low	7	10.00	21	70.00
Total	<b>70</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>3. Who is more dependence?</b>				
Husband	1	1.43	-	-
Wife	63	90.00	-	-
None	6	8.57	30	100.00
Total	<b>70</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>4. Who is more independence?</b>				
Husband	65	92.86	-	-
Wife	-	-	-	-
Both	5	7.14	30	100.00
Total	<b>70</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>5. How much extent role interdependence between husband and wife?</b>				
High	5	7.14	30	100.00
Low	65	92.86	-	-
Total	<b>70</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>6. Who is more cooperative?</b>				
Husband	8	11.43	6	20.00
Wife	62	88.57	24	80.00
<b>0.1.1.1.1 Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>7. Who is more competitive?</b>				
Husband	63	90.00	23	76.67
Wife	7	10.00	7	23.33
<b>0.1.1.1.2 Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>8. Whose role is more consistent?</b>				
Husband	13	18.57	7	23.33
Wife	54	77.14	21	70.00
Both	2	2.86	-	-
None	1	1.43	2	6.67
<b>0.1.1.1.3 Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>

M (Muslim, N=70) S (Santal, N=30)

## 5. DISCUSSION

Marriage relationship is the fundamental unit of family relationship in the study village. This relationship between an adult man and woman is developed by respective communities' cultural norms to meet human needs for survival. After marriage the couples of the communities not only maintain their sexual life, but also take and play roles according to their communities' cultural norms and socio-economic status. The purpose of the present study was to compare marriage relationship, including marital bond development, sexual behavior and role relationship between Muslim and Santal communities in Kalna village of Bangladesh. We assumed that there were significant differences in marriage relationship between the communities. In so doing 100 couples from both the communities (70 couples for

Muslim and 30 couples for Santal samples) were randomly selected by cluster sampling and interview method with questionnaire schedule was applied for data collection. The results of Independent Sample t-test confirm the assumptions that there are significant differences in marriage relationship, especially in age at marriage for wives, sexual frequency and role relationship between husband and wife between the communities in rural Bangladesh.

Age at marriage and marital duration was one of the comparison areas of marriage relationship. The results of the study suggest that age at marriage for the Santal couples was earlier than that the Muslim couples and the men in both the communities were likely to be older than the women. In this respect, different theoretical perspectives offer different explanations. Evolutionary perspective suggests that natural selection has produced males and females attracted to each other for reproductive success and resource distribution to protect themselves and their offspring. According to this perspective, the females who are young are attracted by males, whereas the males who possess sufficient resource to protect them are attracted to the females. These different strategies used by our distance ancestors may also support today's sex differences in mate selection (Buss, 1988a). In cross-cultural perspective Buss (1989b) also found that females place the highest value on cues that indicate a males' resource acquisition (earning, capacity, industriousness, maturity etc.), while males most value on females' reproductive capacity (youth, health and attractiveness).

*Table 7. Comparison of Marital Role Relationship*

Test	Levene's Test for Homogeneity of Variances				T-test for Equality of Means		
	Mean	SD	F	p-value	t	df	p-value
Differentiation	M:1.20 S:1.67	.40 .48	6.67	0.01*	-5.01	98	0.00*
Specialization	M:1.20 S:2.30	.40 .47	0.43	0.51	-8.89	98	0.00*
Dependence	M:2.07 S:3.00	.31 .00	10.71	0.00*	-16.34	98	0.00*
Independence	M:1.14 S:3.00	.52 .00	10.61	0.00*	-19.55	9	0.00*
Inter-dependence	M:2.07 S:1.00	.26 .41	10.61	0.00*	22.56	98	0.00*
Cooperation	M:1.89 S:1.80	.32 .41	4.78	0.03*	1.13	98	0.00*
Competition	M:1.10 S:1.23	.30 .43	11.70	0.00*	-1.77	98	0.00*
Consistency	M:1.87 S:1.90	.51 .71	0.95	0.33	-0.23	98	0.00*

M (Muslim, N=70) S (Santal, N=30) \* p<0.05 level

Social psychologists explain these phenomena using equity theory and feminist perspective. According to them, potential partners seek an equitable "bargain" when they form a relationship. As most societies today are patriarchal, males (especially older males) most likely hold authority to control monetary resources that are traded in the market place to utilizing females' youth and beauty. From this perspective the findings of across cultures and times simply reflect the ability of relatively wealthy males to attract young, attractive and relatively less wealthy female partners. If these

same sex differences in age preferences are found in the matriarchal cultures where women hold economic and political power, evolutionary theory would be strongly supported; reverse findings would be consistent with the equity theory and the feminist perspective.

Sexual behavior was another important aspect in comparison of marriage relationship between the communities in which the couples of both the cultures prefer marital sex in sexual behavior. The results suggest that frequency of sexual intercourse between husband and wife is higher in the Muslim community than in the Santal community, although sexual satisfaction is more or less equal among the couples concerned. The difference in frequency may be accounted for by the high food resources and lower tension and anxiety in social life experienced by Muslim couples. The evolutionary perspective notes that frequency of sex is high when couples are relatively young and gradually decreases due to increase age and responsibilities. Social and biological theories suggest that sex is an essential human need. Goals of human sexual behavior between husband and wife include the release of tension, maintenance of emotional contact with each other and continued human generation. The frequency of sexual behavior depends on the couples' values, their physical capacity and their mental desire for intercourse (Coleman and Cressey 1980; Sabini 1992).

The findings of the study suggest that role relationship between husband and wife is significantly different on those traits that were measured. Role differentiation and specialization between husband and wife of the Muslim culture were higher than that of the Santal culture. Wives of the Muslim culture were more socio-economically dependent on their husbands than the wives of the Santal husbands because Santal women were socio-economically independent due to their daily earning. Interdependency between husband and wife of the Santals was higher than that of Muslim husbands and wives, because of their socio-economic vulnerability. Although husbands of both the cultures were more competitive than the wives, the wives of the Santal culture were more competitive than the wives of Muslim culture. Wives' roles of both the cultures were more consistent than the roles of husbands'.

System theorists argue that the family is a cultural system which binds family members differing in age, sex, personality, gender, and economic status in cohesive ways to fulfill their interpersonal needs and maintain satisfactory human life (Parsons and Bales 1964; Morgan 1975; Bell and Vogel 1960). Family roles are distributed in the ways in which role takers specialize on that role and play it skillfully: the husband will play earning role, controlling and protection role and the mother will play child bearing and rearing role and family care taking role, because she is skillful in these roles according to her biological make up and configuration. On the other hand, conflict and exchange theorists, especially feminist theorist, argue that the ways family roles are distributed creates female dependency, especially economic dependency, on men. According to them the families are poverty stricken both husband and wife are involved in income generating activities in the subsistence economy. Although both husband and wife do earn for family living, cannot fulfill reciprocal needs due to unequal distribution resources between men and women. In addition a mother in this dual earner family plays an earning as well as child socializing, household chores' roles. These multiple roles create strain, stress and pressure in mothers that impact on women's health and social status. In addition, the

outcomes of aggregate roles are not equally distributed creating conflict between husbands and wives relationship (Coser 1966; Nye 1983; Biddle and Thomas 1966; Turner 1999; Piotrkowski 1979).

## 6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study suggest that there are significant differences in the marriage relationship between Muslim and Santal communities in rural Bangladesh. The study finds that in both the communities' marriage occurs at an earlier age for women than for men, but especially early for Santal women. Family role relationships may have negative impacts on women's social and physical and mental health status in Santal families. The results show women of both the communities are more vulnerable and dependent on men in their marriage relationship, due to differences in age at marriage, unequal distribution of family roles and resources due to patriarchal norms.

However, to overcome the existing problem situation in marriage relationship between Muslim and Santal communities in rural Bangladesh the findings of the study may be applied in two ways: one for social policy implication and another for social work practice. Social policy at national level may be designed to increase age at marriage, women's socio-economic status and to establish egalitarian norms in the family as well as in the community. Based on social policy taken at national level social work workers may play important roles, following social work methods at individual, family group and community level to change systematically in the existing marriage relationship norms in which egalitarian norms are developed and established in between men and women relationship, in general, and husband and wife relationship, in particular. However, although the study may have limitations in mixed methodology to explain marriage relationship in cross-cultural perspective, findings of the study may recommend that new researchers will rigorously study on marital power and marital adjustment in cross-ethnic, cross-class, cross-racial and even in cross-cultural perspective in Bangladesh.

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