

# Cross-Cultural Family Structure between Muslim and Santal Communities in Rural Bangladesh: A Review

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**Abstract.** Family structure is a fundamental part of social structure on which human beings immemorally adapt from one generation to another to environment. In recent years cross-cultural studies around the world are increasing to seek universal knowledge on family structure. Based on relevant literatures review this study focuses on differences in family structure between Muslim and Santal communities in rural Bangladesh. In so doing family structure is elementally classified into family size and pattern, family status and role, ownership of family property, family authority and communication. Relevant literatures reviewed suggest that there are wide cultural variations in the elements of family structure between the two communities in rural Bangladesh. Empirical research should conduct on why the elements of family structure are different between the two communities in Bangladesh.

**Key words:** Family Structure, Muslim, Santal, Bangladesh.

## INTRODUCTION

Family structure is the fundamental building block of social structure around the world. Although human nature all over the world is more or less universal, the definition of family and its structure much depends upon the culture of a particular community or society. In this study we mean by family as a group of persons who are united by marriage, blood, or adoption; constituting a single unit; interacting and communicating with each other in their respective status and role between husband and wife, father and mother, son and daughter, brother and sister, grandparents and grand siblings, and other secondary kin if any; and creating and maintaining a common culture (Burgess and Locke, 1945; Burgess et al., 1960; Winch, 1974; Eshleman and Cashion, 1985). Accordingly family structure indicates the arrangement of human relationships into the status and role, authority, and communication patterns intended to fulfill common human need and to meet common human goals (viz. psychosocial, emotional, political, material, sexual needs) of the family members in which they can adapt from one generation to another to particular environment (Sedgwick, 1981; Dyer, 1983).

Evidences suggest that family structure in every society is influenced and shaped by cultural patterns: values, beliefs, norms, attitude, language, customs etc. as well as modes of production (Dyer, 1983; Stephens, 1963) that in broader sense orient, direct and control human nature and nurture systems, and that organize, arrange and integrate family members into certain (marital and family) relationships that help to meet and

satisfy their physiological, material, psycho-emotional, social needs for proper human development and adjustment, preserve and continue all human races and their respective cultures that generate new human infants and transmit those cultures from one generation to another for ensuring effective human adaptation to the environment. The features of family structure are quite universal through which the process of human adaptation is being realized. It is known that family structure consists of family size and composition, family status and role, family power and authority, family communication and interaction, and marital and family relationships. These elements of family structure are quite universal, and may vary from one society to another as well as between the different segments of the same society (Stein and Cloward ed., 1963; Young and Mack, 1965; Berghe, 1978; Hurd, 1986; Popenoe, 1986; United Nations, 1980).

Bangladesh is an agro- economic based rural country where various religious and ethnic communities, who came here for various purposes from Middle Asia, North India, Europe, and other parts of the world at different times from when they all have been living side by side in the same geographical conditions, and have been involving in the historical and social processes that have shaped social as well as familial institutions, and that have developed a distinct mode of production and cultural system (Aziz, 1979; Maloney et al., 1981; Maloney, 1984) in which family structure of all religious and ethnic communities of Bangladesh is embedded and influenced. In this study it is assumed that culture not only shapes, influences, directs, and guides the entire

way of life of a group, community or society as a whole, but also makes variations between and among them. Different research reports (Aziz, 1979; Maloney et al., 1981; Maloney, 1984; Aziz and Maloney, 1985; Sarker, 1997) reveal that family structure in Bangladesh varies between and among the religious and ethnic communities due to variations and differences in their respective (sub) cultural systems because such religious and ethnic communities have their own distinct cultural heritage, identity, and traditions to which they have their own deep psychological, cognitive, emotional, social and religious attachments and sentiments that shape, direct and guide their respective familial and community behavior. Despite socio-economic, ecological and political changes, they all might have preserved their family cultural value systems (Qureshi ed., 1984; Gomes, 1988; Ali, 1998; Sultana, 2003; Uddin 2006). Among the various religious and ethnic communities of Bangladesh, different cultural value systems have been followed between the Muslim and Santal communities in rural Bangladesh where though they have been living side by side and have been interacting within the same village environment. So it in this study is important to identify and explain cross-culturally whether there are significant similarities and differences in family structure between Muslim and Santal communities that have been shaped by their cultural practices. In so doing this study will focus on the major aspects of family structure such as family size and composition, family status and role, family power and authority, family communication and interaction that are the fabric of

social relationships in the family life. How and to what extent the social relationships among the Muslim and Santal families are determined and influenced by their respective cultural patterns, and how and to what extent the social relationships are varied in them will be the subject matter in this research?

### **FAMILY STRUCTURE IN BANGLADESH: MUSLIM AND SANTAL**

Although both the communities: Muslim and Santal in Bangladesh are patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal in nature, their cultural patterns: Muslim culture and Santal culture differ from one another in many ways. The relevant literatures (Uddin, 2006) suggest that there are differences in cultural elements: language, values, beliefs, attitudes, norms, customs or traditions associated with their respective rules of marriage, family formation, division of labor, distribution of family property, rights and privileges, power and authority, communication and interaction patterns and the family relationships between the communities. Comparison of family structure with these elements between the communities selected is given below.

#### **Family Size and Pattern**

Family size refers to the number of persons who include and consider themselves as members within a family, and have biological, social and legal rights to each other in the family (Gore, 1968; Akber & Halim, 1978; Gupta, 1993; Mitra, et al., 1994; Gill, 1995). Every man is born and develops in family of orientation (a family unit in which someone is born as a son and daughter and is reared), and then forms his own family of procreation (a family unit formed by a newly married couples). So, every body is a member of many types of family. In the peasant economy, Muslim culture prefers more complex family (where two or more generations live), because they believe in familism a feeling of subordination of individual goals to the family and belonging to family for co-ordination of family activities to achieve family goals, aid for family members, and maintenance of family continuity, but in Santal culture couples prefer to live in simple family type wherein one or two generations live. Family generation refers to a family group of persons born as a male or female and lived in a specified period of time.

However, relevant studies show that average family size of the Muslim and the Santal community is 5.49 and 4.99 respectively (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1998). In a village study, Sarker (1997) explored that out of 132 families, Muslim nuclear family was 56.8 percent, supplementary nuclear family was 12.1 percent, joint family was 24.9 percent and extended family was 6.2 percent. In a Muslim community Mashreque (1983-84) found that out of 228 families nuclear family was 54.38 percent, sub-nuclear family was 3.07 percent, supplementary nuclear family was 6.58 percent, joint family was 18.42 percent and complex joint was 17.54 percent. Rahaman (1995) in another Muslim community examined and found that out of 203 family's simple family was 75.37 percent and complex family was 24.63 percent. On the other hand, Siddique (1998) in a study of Santal community showed that out of 132 families, nuclear family was 71.97 percent and joint family was 28.03 percent. In another study of Santal Village Kayes (1995) showed that of the families included, nuclear family was 67.5 percent and joint family was 31.25 percent. Uddin (2008) in a recent cross-cultural study revealed that average family size in the Santal community (4.30) was higher than the Muslim community (4.13). However, there are great variations in the size and patterns of the families followed between the two communities.

#### **Marriage Customs and Marriage Pattern**

Marriage is an important aspect of family formation and its structure. Marriage refers to rules or norms of socially and legally approved relationship between an adult man and woman who expect to have relatively enduring relationship involving economic cooperation, and allowing exclusive sexual relationship leading to child bearing and rearing. Marriage is a rule of incorporating members in the family. By marriage every adult woman becomes a member of her husband or husband's parent's family. This process of family membership is called legal or institutional membership (Uddin, 2006, 2009a). Both communities follow endogamy a marriage norm requiring people to marry someone from their own cultural group, and exogamy a marriage norm requiring people to marry someone from outside the group, rules of marriage (Naher, 1985; Sarker, 1997;

Uddin, 2006). Actually, the Muslims and Santal in mate selection are religiously endogamous. The former are both endogamous and exogamous in mojhabs, class, and lineage but the later are tribal endogamous and clan exogamous (Ali, 1998; Sachehidanada, 1998). That is marriage between a Muslim male and a female may occur in any mojhabs, class, lineage (Rahaman, 1995; Sarker, 1997; Uddin, 2006), but a Santal cannot marry within clan except other eleven classes. Although both the communities prefer contracted marriage marital arrangement in which parents or elder members of the family select mates of their son or daughter with or without concerned, the Santal widely practice romantic marriage marital arrangement in which marital partners fall in love and select themselves as mates for marriage (Ali, 1998; Uddin, 2006) but Muslim cannot prefer romantic marriage. According to Islamic rules before marriage an adult male and female can meet together, because it is sinful. Another differences in marriage between the two communities: Muslims prefer both cross-cousin marriage between son and daughter and vice versa of the opposite sex of the parents (marriage between son or daughter of the brother and sister) is approved, and parallel cousin marriage between son and daughter and vice versa of the same sex parents (between brother and brother or sister) recognized, but the Santal may permit cross-cousin marriage to some extent if their clan titles are different, parallel cousin marriage is strictly forbidden, because they think own clan members are their brothers and sisters. In Muslim families, marriage is strictly prohibited among those persons who are closely related to one another by blood, viz. own father, mother, brother, sisters, paternal or maternal uncles, aunts, paternal or maternal grandfather or grandmother, sons, daughters, nieces or nephews (Madani, 1993; Aziz, 1979; Naher, 1985; Sarker, 1997). In both communities grooms pay bride price to the brides. In Muslim culture bride price is to be given to brides is called mohr, but in Santal culture bride price is given to bride's father (Ali, 1998). Another difference in marriage is noteworthy: although both cultures permit polygyny the marriage of one man to more than one wife at a time, sororate and levirate, widow or widower' remarriage, they widely practice monogamy the marriage of one man to one woman at a time or serial monogamy remarriage of

one man to one woman after divorce. In this respect Muslim are more polygynized. According to Islamic rules or Sunna, Muslim male takes four wives at a time, but a Santal cannot, they almost prefer monogamy. Although a Muslim male may take wives up to four according to Sunna; this rule of marriage, in practice, is very rare in Bangladesh. In a study of 1681 married men, only 19 had two wives and only one had three (Aziz, 1979). According to census report of Bangladesh (BBS, 1981, 1991), in 1981 the rate of polygyny was 4.92 percent and in 1991 it was 5.84 percent. Except it there are great differences in marriage ceremonies between the two communities.

### Rules of Residence

Residence refers to the norms by which couples after marriage reside with the bride or groom's parents' family. When people marry they must decide where to live. Decisions about place of residence are typically determined by cultural rules that conform to one or more residences: neolocal is a norm of residence in which newly married couple establishes residence separate from those of both sides of parents, biolocal is a norm of residence in which a newly married couple establishes residence with or near the parents of either spouse, patrilocal is a norm of residence by which a married couple lives with the husband's parents' family or husband family, and matrilocal is another norm by which a couple lives with the wife's parents' family. In this respect there are to some extent differences. Although both communities prefer patrilocal residence, when newly married couples live in outside the village or town, when married couples live in the parents' territory, when husband is died, both husband and wife, and only wife may practice neolocal, matrilocal residences. As both the communities are patriarchal in nature, most of the families in the communities practice patrilocal residence (Sarker, 1997; Ali, 1998; Uddin, 2006) In a recent cross-cultural study Uddin (2009e) explores residence patterns practiced by the Muslim and Santal couples in their family cultural life. The results of the study clearly show that most of the Muslim couples (87.59%) followed patrilocal residence compared to the Santal couples (67.83%). In other residence patterns such as Matrilocal, Biolocal and Neolocal percentages of the Santal cou-

ples are higher than the Muslim couples. Regarding this results of Pearson Chi-Square test also suggest that marital residence patterns followed by the Muslim and Santal couples are significantly different at  $p < 0.01$  level in the village studied ( $X^2 = 16.70$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $Sig. = .001$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

### Family Status and Role

The word 'status' and 'role' are the different aspects of same system. Both the terms bind together the respective members in structural relationships with shared and ordered expectations at family level. Family status refers to the locations of positions of achieved and ascribed characteristics of the family members. Such characteristics are as age, sex, gender, kinship, income, occupation, education etc. that the members in the family occupy are called family status. On the other hand, family role is the aggregations of shared, ordered, and reciprocally expected behavior of the family members who occupy the given statuses within the family. Both communities reinforce family members to attain family statuses, which assign on them (Uddin, 2006; Uddin, 2009b). In respect of education, occupation and income of the characteristics of the family status formal education and occupation in the Muslim family are higher than Santal families, but income of women in the Santal families is higher than the women do in the Muslim families. Because Muslim women cannot involve in formal labor force to earn money due to social and sex taboos.

Division of labor in the family may vary from one society to another and within the different segments of the same society. Particularly, there is no difference in division of labor among the children under the age of 15 years of both the sexes in both the Muslim and the Santal communities. Because the children of both the groups do petty work in the fields, in cattle tending, collection of cow dung, firewood, growing and selling vegetables, in doing paid work as a child laborer and domestic servant (Satter, 1984). But there are differences in division of labor between men and women after the puberty period in the Muslim and Santal community. In the Santal community, both the adult male and female take part in agriculture and any other fields of operations as manual labor inside and outside the family. The Santal women work outside the family from

dawn to dusk either as paid or unpaid laborer (Ali, 1998; Sachchidananda, 1998; Bandyopadhyay, 1999), whereas division of labor is strictly maintained among the adult Muslim males and females according to sex norms. They think adult men are only breadwinner of the family. So the Muslim men work in agricultural field, petty trade and business, and other formal and informal organizations. Generally, Muslim women do not work on the agricultural field and do not go outside the family alone. Their main functions are to bear and rear children, maintain family chores, serve family members and observe purdah. In the lower class families, women have to work outside the family under economic pressure for maintaining the family (Abdulla & Zeidenstain, 1982; Afsaruddin, 1990; Alam, 1995; Jansen, 1999). In a cross-cultural study Uddin (2006) examines family role distributions in economic, social, constructive, organizational and leading family activities between the communities. These activities are assigned on the husband/father, wife or mother, son or daughter specifically or all together (jointly). Among the family functions economic activities such as earning, working/cultivating, planting, crop tending, harvesting, crop processing, rice processing, fishing, tending domestic animals, marketing- all these are central concerned in subsistent economy. These functions of the family are distributed exclusively male or female members or jointly. About 86 percent husband/father, 3 percent both husband and wife, 1 percent son and 9 percent jointly of the Muslim respondents and 6 percent wife/mother only, 40 percent both husband and wife, 3 percent daughter and 50 percent jointly earned for their respective family. In other economic activities such as cultivating, planting paddy, crop tending, harvesting, crop processing, net making and fishing, marketing exclusively husband/father and son of the Muslim and jointly of the Santal respondents involve, but in mat making, gathering wild vegetables, gardening tending domestic animals, rice processing either exclusively women or sometimes both men and women of both the communities involve. About 86 percent of husband/father, 9 percent son exclusively and 33 percent jointly of the Muslim and 15 percent of wife or mother and 70 percent jointly of the Santal samples involve in economic activities. Child rearing and

socialization is exclusively women, mother or daughter role. Sometimes father and other members involve in these activities when mothers are busy to family chores and food making. In child socialization 55 percent of the Muslim mothers and 35 percent of the Santal mother exclusively involved in, but 41 percent of the Muslim and 39 percent of the Santal (both husband and wife) involve in and rest of them are jointly involved in child rearing and educating their children. Family chores include cooking, clearing and freshing home, weaving etc. These activities of the family are exclusively women (mother and daughter). Mother cooked 56 percent of the Muslim women and 63 percent of the Santal cooked food, but 43 percent mother and daughter of the Muslim and 36 percent of the Santal cook food jointly. In respect of water fetching and weaving mother and daughter exclusively involve in. Organization of family activities and control behavior of the family members are very much important functions of the family. These functions are mainly domain of husband and father or elder brother or grandfather. About 90 percent of the Muslim respondents and 80 percent of the Santal respondents controlled home management, 95 percent of the Muslim and 96 percent of the Santal organized family activities by husband, father and the rest are jointly by either mother or father. In child disciplining 24 percent of the Muslim and 37 percent of the Santal are mother's activities but the rest of them are both mother and father jointly. However, the discussion, above mentioned, clearly shows that there are vast differences at percentages in family status and role between Muslim and Santal communities, although there have similarities to some extent. In another study Uddin (2009e) reports that most of the Santal couples compared to the Muslim ones highly (40.56%) and moderately (50.35%) would share family roles with each other to meet day-to-day needs. That is family role sharing between the Muslim husband and wife was very low (62.07%). The results of Pearson Chi-Square test on the family role sharing between Muslim and Santal couples are also significantly different at (( $X^2= 95.14$ ,  $df= 2$ ,  $Sig. = .000$ )  $p<0.01$  level.

#### **Family Power and Authority**

Family power and authority are different but are related concepts in structural rela-

tionships, which indicate domination, control, influence, compliance, resistance, subjugation, and decision-making within the family. Wolfe (1959) defines "Power is the potential ability of one person, O, to induce forces on another person, P, toward (or against) movement or change in a given direction, within a given behavior region, at a given time (Cartwright, ed., 1959). Cromwell and Olson (1975): Family power, a property of a family system, is the ability (potential or actual) of individual members to change the behavior of other family members. Family authority refers to norms by which legitimate power is assigned on the family member who controls behavior in the family and makes important decisions about family matters (Sarker, 1997).

Power and authority in the family depends on the status of the family members who control over property and resources. Although both communities are male dominated, there are differences in power and authority between men and women in the family. The Santal in Bangladesh are very poor. Most of them have no land property and usually live in nuclear family. In this situation, both male and female members of the family work outside the home as paid wage laborers. Economically, both adult men and women and even children are independent. Each of them enjoys freedom and autonomy. So, both husband and wife take part in decision-making process concerning the family affairs. In the Santal community, women have a great influence on their counterpart (Kayes, 1995; Siddique, 1998), although legitimate power remains with them. On the other hand, elderly male members in the Muslim family dominate family affairs. Traditionally, aged male as a head of the family can decide all affairs of the family without discussion with other members. According to research reports, Muslim women, in some families, have no social identity; they are known in the kinship position as daughter, wife, mother, and grandmother of someone (Sarker, 1997). They are almost dependent on their male partners in their life cycle for livelihood. In this situation, women and other dependent members cannot fully participate in the decision-making process in the family. So, they cannot influence their male partners as the Santal women do (Mannan, 1989). In a cross-cultural study Uddin (2009e) finds that most of the Muslim couples

follow autocratic authority (62.07%), while most of the Santal couples practice Syncratic authority (71.33%) compared to other authority patterns to manage and lead their families. The results of Pearson Chi-Square test reveal that family authority patterns practiced by the communities are significantly different at ( $X^2= 55.58$ ,  $df= 2$ ,  $Sig. = .000$ )  $p<0.01$  level.

#### **Family Communication and Interaction**

Family communication and interaction are both relational terms of the family structure. Without communication and interaction among the family members, human needs remain unmet and unfulfilled, and family relationships among them are obscure, and become impossible. Family communication is a process by which mutual understanding and consciousness about the family matters occur among the family members. Sedgwick (1981) maintains that "Family communication can be defined as the organization and use of words, gestures, expressions, sounds, and action to create expectations, portray images, describe feelings, and share meaning", Meadowcroft and Fitzpatrick (1988) opine that "Family communication is viewed as playing an integral part in the Stability, maintenance, and change that occurs in close relationships as well as playing a key role in childhood socialization". On the other hand, family interaction usually occurs between two or more individual members who are related by birth, marriage, and adoption, and consider themselves as constituting a family group, as being subject to family norm-role definitions of their group, and engage or share in interaction sufficient to support this family definition (Vernon, 1965). In other words, family interaction is a process by which mutual actions and reactions, stimulations, and responses take place among the members who are involved in the family process to gain personal and family goals.

Interaction and communication are important sources to exchange reciprocal fellow feelings and perceptions to gather information, to determine and achieve family goals and to control behavior of the family members. In this respect there are distinct variations in interaction and communication patterns in the family of the two communities. In the Muslim community, communication and interaction are influenced by age and sex norms.

According to Islamic code of conduct, younger members respect elderly persons in the family. In this sense, communication and interaction between elderly and younger generations are less frequent; they are both avoidance groups in the Muslim families. For example, those adult unmarried men and women who are eligible for marriage with each other are considered to belong to avoidance groups; they cannot communicate and interact with one another easily because Islamic laws prohibit communication and interaction among them. The non-avoidance group for males includes mother, sister, mother-in-law, paternal and maternal aunt, father's and mother's aunt, sister's daughter, brother's daughter etc. and non-avoidance group for females includes husband's brother, father, paternal and maternal uncles, brother and sister's son, grandfather and grandmother etc. and vice versa (Aziz, 1979; Madani, 1993).

On the other hand, in the Santal community after marriage, certain relatives must avoid addressing each other by name, for it is considered disrespectful to do so. In Santal culture communication between husband and wife, parents and siblings, grandparents and grand siblings is direct, although they strictly maintain avoidance and joking groups. According to Santal culture, avoidance is maintained among the (i) husband's elder brother and younger brother's wife, (ii) younger sister's husband and wife's elder sister, (iii) husband's elder sister's husband and wife's brother's wife, (iv) husband's younger sister's husband and wife's elder brother's wife, (v) husband's elder sister and younger brother's wife, (vi) Son's or daughter's spouse's parent of the opposite sex, (vii) mother's brother and sister's children. Except these groups others belong to joking groups. In joking groups, they easily communicate with each other between wife's younger sister and woman's elder sister's husband, a man's younger brother's wife's sister and a woman's sister's husband's elder brother, a man's elder brother's wife' sister and a woman's sister's husband's younger brother, a man's elder sister's husband's younger sister and a woman's elder brother's wife's younger brother, a man's wife's younger brother and a man's elder sister's husband, a woman's elder brother's wife and a woman's husband's younger sister, and grandparents and grand children of both the sexes. In avoidance and joking groups there are differences in

non-verbal communication patterns such as gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, distance, touch etc. between the two communities. In this purpose, Muslim women-married or unmarried-maintain more distance than Santal women; eye contact between husband and wife, male and female in Santal families is more frequent than in Muslim families, Muslim women cover their body more than Santal women. Although both the communities are dominated by men in all affairs of community social life, about 56.55% of the Muslim practices autocratic communication in the family, while 27.27% of the Santal prefer this type of family communication. In democratic and egalitarian family communication frequency of the Santal (48.95% for democratic communication and 23.78% for egalitarian communication) is higher than the Muslim (31.72% for democratic communication and 11.73% for egalitarian communication) respectively (Uddin, 2009e). However, Muslim families follow more autocratic family communication, but the Santal prefer more democratic and even egalitarian family communication. The result of Pearson Chi-Square test shows that family communication patterns are significantly different between the two communities in the study village, Kanla ( $X^2 = 25.90$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $Sig. = .000$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

#### **Ownership of Property**

Rules of ownership of property also show great variations between the two communities. In the Santal community, family property is transformed from father to son, not to daughter (Satter, 1984; Sachchidananda 1998). After the death of the husband, a wife cannot inherit property from him. On the other hand, rules of inheritance among the Muslim in Bangladesh are mainly based on the Islamic law of inheritance. According to Islamic law of inheritance, all sons inherit an equal amount of property or wealth if any, but a daughter inherits half the amount a son gets. From the legal point of view a Muslim woman is an heir to the property of her father, mother, husband, son, and even daughter. When her husband dies, the widow should inherit one eighth of his property and if he dies childless, she should inherit one fourth. The other part of the property is passed on to the husband's closest relatives. If no son is born to a couple, daughters alone cannot inherit all the properties of their parents; a part of the

properties of the parents goes to their father's brother's sons (Aziz, 1979; Jansen, 1999). In this respect, some studies reveal that there is a gap between a woman's inheritance rights and the actual practice in which women and younger brothers are, to some extent, deprived. In a recent study Uddin (2009e) indicates that although the Santal family relations compared to the Muslim ones are more egalitarian, property distribution between son and daughter in the former is more unequal than the later. The result of the study reveals that inequality of family property distribution in the Santal community is higher than its counterpart, the Muslim community. The results also vary at  $p < 0.01$  level.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The study of family structure remains a primary vista for understanding the nature of broader social dynamics in every society. To maintain and sustain the structures of the family, there are many internal and external functions of the family. Of the functions, sexual, economic, reproductive, and educational are very important for the survival of a society. Because without provision for the first, and third, society would become extinct; for the second, life itself would cease; for the fourth, culture would come to an end (Murdock, 1960). So through studying the family and its basic structure we would get to understand the processes by which a society and its culture survive. Each society and culture devises its own family structure based on the formula which proves successful in fulfilling certain basic human needs under its specific circumstances (Aziz, 1970). To fulfill basic human needs of every person each society defines certain patterns of family, its functions, marriage rules, role and status of its members, and assign power and authority on one or more individual members within the family, communicate and interact with each other in certain patterns, and determine characteristics of family relationship. The above discussion clearly shows that there are vast differences in the elements of family structure viz. family size and composition, family status and role, family power and authority, family communication and interaction between Muslim and Santal communities in Bangladesh. Future cross-cultural study should conduct on why the elements of family structure vary between the two communities in Bangladesh.

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