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Cross-Cultural Age Ascription between Muslim and Santal Communities in Rural Bangladesh

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This study compares ideal age ascription across family life Muslim and Santal cultures in rural Bangladesh. We hypothesized that age ascription for family life situation occurs earlier in the Santal culture than in the Muslim culture in rural Bangladesh. One hundred couples (70 Muslim and 30 Santal) were selected by cluster random sampling from the Kalna village situated in the Tanore Upazila of Rajshahi district, Bangladesh, and were intensively interviewed by author. Results reveal significant differences in ideal age assignment between the Muslim and Santal communities. Further cross-cultural study should be done how socio-cultural factors influence variations in ideal age status assignment between the two communities in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Age Ascription, Family Life Situation, Muslim, Santal, Village Bangladesh.

1. INTRODUCTION

Family status is the building block of social structure that arranges family members in social relations intended to meet human needs: production, reproduction, socialization and system maintenance across the generations. In order to meet these human needs family status is culturally replaced and transformed into the new generation (Biddle and Thomas 1966; Bell and Vogel 1960; Linton 1936; Mayhew 1968; Matras 1975; Piotrkowsky 1979). In structural typological analysis family status has been classified into two main categories: (1) status ascription: age, sex, race, kinship and (2) status attainment: socio-economic status that are universal (Brown 1976; Linton 1936; Mayhew 1968; Matras 1975). With the dichotomy of family status arrangements members of the family play important roles to adapt to the changing environment. This study focuses on ideal age status ascription for Muslim and Santal family life situations in rural Bangladesh (Uddin 2006).

Age ascription is a universal phenomenon that is culturally constructed for schooling, working or earning, separation/attachment, marrying, childbearing/motherhood and family authority maintenance across the cultures. Cross-cultural studies reveal that the parents with minority group and lower socio-cultural status compared to the parents with majority group and higher socio-cultural ones tended to delay age for schooling (Hauser et al. 1982; Mazzoni, Gambrell and Korkeamaki 1999; Nsamenang 2006), to delay separate sleeping between parent and sibling and/or between the siblings (Owens 2004; Latz, Wolf, and Lozoff 1999; Morelli, Rogoff, Oppenheim, and Goldsmith 1992; Kawasaki et al. 1994), but assign children earlier involvement in familial and extra-familial productive activities (Larsen 2003), marrying and parenthood (Billari, Prskawetz, and Furnkranz 2002; Balestrino and Ciardi 2007; Choe, Thapa, and Mishra 2004; Husz 2008; Matsuo, Banerjee, and Hutter 2004; Majumder et al. 2005; Singh 2006; Saikia, Steele, and Dasvarma 2009) and family authorizing (Uddin 2006). In addition, conservative parents compared to the liberal parents prohibit interaction between adolescent boys and girls earlier.

Several research reports in Bangladesh reveal that age assignment of the Muslim parents for their children's schooling is earlier than that the children of Santal parents (Ali 1998; Rahman 1984; Satter 1984; Uddin 2006). In the involvement of working and earning activities the status of the Santal children is earlier compared to the status of the Muslim children (Uddin 2006). Separate sleeping between parent and sibling and/or between brother and sister in the Muslim culture is earlier than the Santal culture. Although the Muslim male and female children can communicate with one other until early or middle childhood, after puberty their interaction is culturally restricted (Uddin 2006). In contrast, Santal children across the age and sex levels may communicate each other (Ali 1998). Marrying and childbearing and authority assignment in the Santal culture occur earlier than their counterpart the Muslim culture (Kayes 1995; Sultana 2003; Uddin 2006).

2. CULTURAL BACKGROUND AND AGE ASCRIPTION

Bangladesh is an agrarian economy based rural country where Muslim and Santal live side by side. The *Muslim* in this country is the dominant group, while the Santal are the non-dominant group. Religiously, the former believe in Monotheism (Levy 1963; Alam 1995; Sarker 1997), but the later believe in animism (Bongas). The former speak in *Bengali* language with the mixture of *Arabic-Urdu* preference. On the other hand the later speak in *Austric-Mundary*, and sometimes speak in *Bengali* version with the other *Bengali*-speaking people (Ali 1998; Sultana 2003). Economically, both the communities live in subsistence economies in which most of them are poor. Minority groups such as the Santal are the poorest of the poor. One report indicates that 53% of the rural people are poor and there are 55 million food insecure households and 62% adults are illiterate (World Bank 2000). Although main occupation of the rural villagers is agriculture, man-land ratio is very low and many of them are landless or nearly landless due to law 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).

In this subsistence economy, 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 and many other fields, such as manual labor 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 should be the only breadwinner of the family. So the Muslim men have to work in agriculture and other economic sectors. Generally, Muslim women do not do agricultural work and do not go outside the family alone. Their main functions are to bear and rear children, perform family chores, and serve family members. Women in lower class families work outside the family under economic pressure for family maintenance (Afsaruddin 1990; Jansen 1999). Sarker (1997) and others indicate that the vast majority of Muslim women in Bangladesh are not only poor and are confined in four walls in the household, but also depend on three pillars of their support: on father, husband and son in their life cycle. The present study assumes that culture in every society or subculture within the given society influences marriage and family relationships. In

such fundamental belief systems and socio-economic status ideal age status assignments for schooling, working/earning, separation, sleeping, marrying and family authority continuation between the Muslim and Santal communities are widely different in rural Bangladesh context.

Schooling

Cross-cultural studies suggest that culturally appropriate ideal age for formal schooling of children varies widely (Larsen 2003; Long 1984; Mazzoni, Gambrell and Korkeamaki 1999; Nsamenang 2006; Peek 1979). For example, Mazzoni, Gambrell and Korkeamaki (1999) argue that children begin their elementary school at 6 in the United States and age 7 in Finland because of the initial acquisition of reading skills and motivation for schooling. The ideal age for first schooling in Bangladesh is 5 years, although several research reports indicate that age for schooling widely varies by religion, region, class and ethnicity. Uddin (2006) and others (Field and Ambrus 2006; Khanam 2006; Rahman 1984; Siddiquee 1984; Shafiq 2007) found that the parents of the majority culture, such as the Muslim, had more aspirations for their children's' education compared to the minority parents because of their higher socio-economic status, lower use of child labor, and more job opportunity in formal labor force participation. As a result, the former motivate their children to early enrollment for their formal schooling, while minorities delayed entry to schooling. We may hypothesize: *Children's schooling in the Muslim community is earlier than the Santal's children in rural Bangladesh.*

Labor

Every man from childhood to until death works to meet human needs. When a child becomes involved in the labor within and outside the family also depends on cultural patterns, family socio-economic status and economic system (Larsen 2003; Long 1984; Mendelievich 1979; Uddin 2006). Although child labor in Bangladesh is forbidden, children of lower class and/or minority families often perform wage from an early age because of parental poverty (Alam, Mondal, and Rahman 2008; Khanam 2004;2006). Uddin (2006) and Satter (1984) found that age of working or earning status in the Santal culture was earlier than that in the Muslim culture due to mass poverty and slow cultural change and modernization. We may hypothesize: *Children working or earning in the Muslim community is earlier than the Santal's children in rural Bangladesh.*

Separate Sleeping

Sleeping is a basic human need without which man cannot be sound mentally and physically (Mayes 1983). Although sleeping is a universal phenomenon it is socio-culturally patterned in every society. In many societies babies sleep with the mother due to sucking and care and gradually attach to the father as with age. When children become independent, they sleep separately from the parents (Owens 2004; Latz Wolf, and Lozoff 1999; Morelli, Rogoff, Oppenheim, and Goldsmith 1992; Kawasaki et al. 1994). The age at which children are

provided sleeping arrangement separate from their parents and from their siblings differs in the Muslim and Santal communities. Uddin (2006) found that about 70 percent of the Muslim and 54 percent of the Santal considered that parents should separately sleep when children were 8-9 years, 33 percent of the Muslim compared to 26 percent of the Santal thought that parents should separately sleep with the children when they were 10-11 years. And the rest of the both respondents set the age as 12 years or above. In brother and sister sleeping arrangement about 10 percent of the Muslim and 6 percent of the Santal thought that brother and sister should separately sleep when they were 6-8 years, 86 percent of both the communities thought the age of separate sleeping between son and daughter should be 9-11 years. We may hypothesize: *Separate sleeping between parent and children and/or between brother and sister in the Muslim community is earlier than that in the Santal community in rural Bangladesh.*

Interaction Prohibition

Great cultural variation exists for the norms interpersonal interaction along the dimensions of age, sex, and ethnicity (Uddin 2006). Muslim male and female children can freely communicate with one other at early or middle childhood; but after puberty their interaction is strictly restricted by cultural norms concerning potential sexual behavior. In contrast, Santal children across the age and sex levels may communicate each other freely during all life stages (Uddin 2006). We may hypothesize: *Interaction prohibition among the Muslim's adolescent boys and girls is earlier than that in the Santal community in rural Bangladesh.*

Marriage and Childbearing

The ideal age for marriage and childbearing for both males and females widely varies around the world. Early marriage occurs in the rural and minority families in the developing and under-developed cultures, especially in Bangladesh; many women becoming mothers before the age of legal marriage (Asaduzzaman 2009; Billari, Prskawetz, and Furnkranz 2002; Balestrino and Ciardi 2007; Choe, Thapa, and Mishra 2004; Field and Ambrus 2006; Khambalia, Choudhury, and Zlotkin 2006; Majumder, 2005, Matsuo, Banerjee, and Hutter 2004; Singh 2006; Saikia, Steele, and Dasvarma 2009). The legal age at marriage in Bangladesh is 19 years for female and 21 years for male and they acquire parenthood accordingly (Aziz & Maloney 1985). So, we may hypothesize that *ideal age at marriage for both male and female and their parenthood in the Santal culture compared to the Muslim culture is earlier* (Uddin 2006).

Family Authority

In patriarchal communities the father or an elder male member holds authority in the family (Sarker 1997; Uddin and Arefin 2007). As he gradually declines physically he may transfer authority to a younger member of the same sex, usually a mature son. When family authority is ceded to a son depends on cultural age norms (Uddin 2006). Uddin (2006) found that about 8 percent of the Muslim and 17 percent of the Santal parents opined that when a son

became 20-24 years, parents would assign authority on him, 50 percent of the Muslim and 62 percent of the Santal considered appropriate age for authority assignment was 25-29 years, but 37 percent of the Muslim and 20 percent of the Santal thought of suitable age of authority assignment was 30 years and above. We may hypothesize: *ideal age assignment for family authorizing in the Santal culture compared to the Muslim culture is earlier in rural Bangladesh.*

3. DATA AND METHODS

Participants

The village of *Kalna* (situated in the *Talonda* union of *Tanore Upazila* of *Rajshahi* district) was selected for this study Muslim and Santal communities live side by side as neighbors in the same geographical setting. In this village there were about 380 families. Among the families 300 families were Muslim's and the rest of them were Santal's. For our research, two separate sampling units were developed: one for Muslim and another for Santal. Each community was considered as a cluster and each couple of both the cluster communities was identified as a study unit. In order to create homogeneity in age status ascription of the couples 70 (24%) couples of the Muslim cluster community and 30 (36%) couples of the Santal cluster community were selected through cluster random sampling, where both the husband and wife of the samples were sincerely agreed to participate in the study.

Measures

Muslim and Santal community's couples and their socio-economic status were background factors in which ideal age status ascription of the communities is embedded (Bharat 1996). In measurement of background factors *Community* was nominally measured and coded as 1= Muslim, and 2= Santal. *Family type* was nominally measured and coded as 1= Nuclear Family and 2= Joint (Extended) Family. *Education* was numerically measured in years. *Occupation* was nominally measured and coded as 1= Farming, 2= Small business, 3= Day laboring and 4= Van pulling. *Yearly total income* was numerically measured in Taka (1 US\$ = 68 Bangladesh Taka in currency exchange). *Current age* for husband and wife was also assessed in years. We numerically measured ideal age status ascription across the family life situations: schooling, working or earning, separation/attachment in the same and /or cross-sex, marrying, childbearing/motherhood and family authority assignment on the son that were comparison area of the study. In so doing, we accounted for ideal age in years for family life situations: schooling, working, separation, sleeping, marrying, childbearing, and authority assignment. For example, we designed a questionnaire on when a child should be gone to school, when s(he) should be involved in familial and extra-familial productive activities, when co-sleeping between parents and sibling and even if brother and sister should be discouraged, when interaction between boys and girls should be encouraged and/or prohibited, when marriage for the siblings (male and female) should be arranged by the parents, when a baby should be borne by a married woman and when family authority and power should be assigned to the son (Uddin 2006).

Data Collection Procedures

Field work with the open-ended questionnaire was conducted from January to June, 2005. In the first month of the fieldwork, January, before final data collection rapport was built up with the selected respondents of two religious communities. The aim of rapport building was to familiarize the respondents about the research aims and subject matter, to build up interpersonal trust between the researcher and respondents, and to encourage them to fully participate in the research (Pareek & Rao 1980). In the following months the author personally interviewed all the respondents. As most of the respondents were illiterate the questionnaire was read to them by the author. At first interview the simple questions, such as socio-economic background questions were asked to the respondents and then the questions of age ascription of family life situations were presented to them. Questions that were not fully understood at first hearing were discussed with respondents. Most interviews were completed in about ninety minutes. Interviews were conducted in the afternoon, when respondents were resting from work. The interviews were conducted in *Bengali*, because all respondents were able to converse effectively in the national language. Muslim respondents sometime used a mixture of *Arabic* and *Urdu* words (Uddin 2006), and the Santal sometimes used *Santali* words (Ali 1998). Respondents were paid 100 Taka (Bangladeshi currency) for participation.

Statistical Analysis

As our sample for the two cultural communities (Muslim=70 and Santal=30) was small, the data were analyzed by descriptive statistics and by independent sample t tests. Results of the analyses are presented by cross-tabulation.

4. RESULTS

The couples in the study ranged in age from 15 to 50 years. Most of the couples lived in nuclear families (95% for Muslim and 80% for Santal) with in minority in extended families. Although main occupation of the respondents was agriculture, 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 only 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). On the other hand, all the Muslim wives were housewives and the Santal wives were both housewives as well as day laborers. Most of the respondents were totally illiterate. Some of them completed primary and secondary education. Most of the families earned from TK.10 to 20 thousands (31% for Muslim and 80% for Santal); 27% of the Muslim and 16% of the Santal earned 21-30 thousands, and about 40% of the Muslim and 3% of the Santal families were 31-50 thousand and above. Family income was higher for Muslim families than for Santal families.

Age Ascription

Table 1 (next page) shows data on age and sex status assignment including schooling, working, earning, separation between parents and siblings for sleeping and separation for boys and girls, marriage for male and female and getting parenthood and assignment of authority to the adult son. The data on these variables in this table show that 61.43 percent of the Muslim respondents and 43.33 percent of the Santal respondents gave opinion that at 5-6 age a child should go to school, 38.57 percent of Muslim respondents and 56.67 percent of the Santal respondents thought that at 7-8 age children should admit at school. At age when a son or daughter would involve in the familial activities within and outside the family depends on family socio-economic and cultural situation. The table also shows that about 65 percent of the Muslim parents and 3 percent of the Santal parents thought that at the age group 20-24 a son or daughter should work, but 93 percent of the Santal parents consider that at 10-14 age children should involve in the working activities for family earning.

Separate sleeping between parents and siblings is an important age marker for male and female children. According to our sampled respondents about 54 percent of the Muslim and 70 percent of the Santal considered that parents should sleep separately when children were 8-9 years, 33 percent of the Muslim thought that parents should separately sleep with the children when they were at age 10-11 than were compared to 26 percent of the Santal. The remainder of the both respondents gave response that parents should separately sleep either at 6-7 or 12 years or above. In sleeping arrangement between brother and sister about 10 percent of the Muslim and 6 percent of the Santal thought that brother and sister should separately sleep at age 6-8, 86 percent of both the communities' respondents thought of separate sleeping between son and daughter was at age 9-11.

The separation of the sexes around puberty is an important cultural marker in many societies. About 13 percent of the Muslim and 3 percent of the Santal opined that at age 10-11 boys and girls should be separate and cannot interact with each other, but 78 percent of the Muslim and 80 percent of the Santal samples thought that separating age between adolescent boys and girls to interaction was at age 12-13.

The table shows that about 33 percent of the Muslim and 55 percent of the Santal informed us that every male should be married under age 20, 25 percent of the Muslim and 20 percent of the Santal position about this was 21-24, but 41 percent of the Muslim and 24 percent of the Santal parents thought that a male should be married at age 25 and above. Both communities assigned an earlier age for female marriage, with most respondents holding that a female should be married at age 16-18 (57% for Muslim and 58% for Santal), 38 percent of the Muslim and 13 percent of the Santal opined that marital age for female should be within 19-21 years, but 27 percent of the Santal thought of marital age for female should be under 15 years than were compared to 4 percent of the Muslim to 22 years and above.

Table 1. Data Summary

Age Ascription for the Family Life Situations	Muslim%	Santal%
1. Schooling		
5-6	61.33	43.33
7-8	38.57	56.67
Total	100.00	100.00
2. Working or Earning		
10-14	2.90	93.33
15-19	8.70	3.33
20-24	65.22	3.33
25+	23.19	-
Total	1000.00	100.00
3. Separate Sleeping between Parent & Sibling		
6-7	8.82	3.39
8-9	54.41	70.00
10+	36.76	26.67
Total	100.00	100.00
4. Separate Sleeping between Brother & Sister		
6-8	10.29	6.67
9-11	86.76	86.67
12+	2.54	2.67
Total	100.00	100.00
5. Interaction Prohibition between Adolescent Boy and Girl		
10-11	13.04	20.00
12-13	78.26	80.00
14+	8.70	-
Total	100.00	100.00
6. Marriage Age for Male		
>20	33.82	55.17
21-24	25.00	20.69
25-28	38.24	20.69
29+	2.94	3.45
Total	100.00	100.00
7. Marriage Age for Female		
>15	-	27.59
16-18	57.35	58.62
19-21	38.24	13.79
22+	4.41	-
Total	100.00	100.00
8. Child Bearing		
15-17	75.00	44.83
18-19	17.65	48.28
20+	7.35	6.90
Total	100.00	100.00
9. Family Authority		
20-24	8.70	17.24
25-29	50.72	62.07
30+	37.68	20.69
Total	100.00	100.00

Seventy-five percent of the Muslim and 44 percent of the Santal couples informed us that after marriage a couple should become parents at age 15-17, 17 percent of the Muslim and 48 percent of the Santal opined about this was at age 18-19, but 7 percent of the Muslim and 6 percent of the Santal responded that a couple should be parents at age 20 and above.

Parents, especially the father holds authority in the family. He gradually declines physically and makes sure family authority is passed to another male. He assigns authority to a mature son who is able to conduct family business. About 8 percent of the Muslim and 17 percent of the Santal parents informed us that when a son becomes 20-24 years, parents should assign authority on him, 50 percent of the Muslim and 62 percent of the Santal considered appropriate age for assignment authority on son was 25-29 years, but 37 percent of the Muslim and 20 percent of the Santal thought of suitable age of assignment authority on son was 30 years and above.

Comparisons of Age Ascription

Table 2 (next page) presents data on ideal age status assignment for schooling, working or earning, separation/attachment in the same and /or cross-sexes, marrying, childbearing/motherhood and family authority maintenance by Muslim and Santal communities in rural Bangladesh. The table shows that average age status for formal schooling of the Santal children was later than that the Muslim children. In Santal children were also to become involved in work outside the home earlier than Muslim children. Average age for separate sleeping between Muslim parent and sibling and/or between brother and sister was earlier than that in the Santal ones. The Santal sample showed an earlier age of prohibition of male and female communication than the Muslim sample. The Santal couples suggested an earlier mean age of marriage for males and females and an earlier age of parenthood than Muslim couples. The Santal sample tended to assign a slightly later age of authority than the Muslim sample. The results of independent sample t-test suggest that of the indicators only schooling, working and marrying for female were significantly different ($p < 0.05$).

5. DISCUSSION

Age ascription is the fundamental aspect of social structure that is culturally constructed in every society. The purpose of the study was to explore and compare ideal age status assignment across the family life, of Muslim and Santal communities in rural Bangladesh. The study searched for significant differences in ideal age status assignment on the family issues between the communities in rural Bangladesh. The results suggest that there were significant differences in ideal age for schooling, working/earning and marrying for daughter.

Ideal age for formal schooling of the children widely varies: widely among cultures (Larsen 2003; Long 1984; Mazzoni, Gambrell and Korkeamaki 1999; Nsamenang 2006, Peek 1979). Ideal age for schooling in the Santal community was later than in the Muslim community. The findings of the study are consistent with several studies across the cultures. Uddin (2006)

and others (Field and Ambrus 2006; Khanam 2006; Rahman 1984, Siddiquee 1984; Shafiq 2007) found that the parents of the majority, such as the Muslim, had more aspirations for their children's' education compared to the minority parents because of their higher socio-economic status, lower child labor, and more job opportunity in formal labor force participation. As a result the former motivate their children to early enrollment for their formal schooling, while the later are delayed entry to schooling.

Table 2. Summary of hypothesis tests

Test for Age Ascription Characteristics	Mean	SD	Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
			F	P-value	t	df	p-value
Schooling	M:5.66 S:6.40	.83 1.00	2.95	.09	-3.84	98	.00*
Working/Earning	M:22.07 S:12.83	9.95 2.79	2.24	.14	4.99	98	.00*
Separate sleeping between parents and children	M: 8.77 S:11.61	.97 15.14	2.68	.11	1.03	98	.31
Separate sleeping between brother and sister	M:12.37 S: 12.37	.96 15.01	2.91	.09	.87	98	.38
Interaction Prohibition between boy and girl	M:10.97 S:9.50	10.72 .82	1.07	.30	.75	98	.46
Marrying for male	M:22.63 S:21.43	3.53 3.63	.14	.71	1.54	98	.13
Marrying for female	M:18.43 S:16.13	2.31 3.04	7.11	.01*	4.13	98	.00*
Childbearing	M:20.96 S:19.03	1.48 1.58	.10	.76	-1.23	98	.26
Family Authorizing	M:27.64 S:28.33	9.30 13.72	.61	.44	-.29	98	.77

M (Muslim N=70) and S (Santal N=30) * P<0.05 level

Every man from childhood to until death works to meet human needs. When a son or daughter will involve in the familial activities within and outside the family also depends on cultural patterns, family socio-economic status and economic system. As these socio-cultural situations vary from Muslim to Santal, ideal age status for working or earning of the children for family economic support also varies between the communities (Larsen 2003; Long 1984; Mendelievich 1979; Uddin 2006). Although child labor in Bangladesh is forbidden, children of lower class families compared to middle class or upper class ones, children of majority group compared to the minority ones work from early ages because of parental severe poverty (Alam, Mondal, and Rahman 2008; Khanam 2004; 2006). Uddin (2006) and Satter (1984) found that age of working in the Santal culture was earlier than that in the Muslim culture due to mass poverty and slow cultural change and modernization.

Ideal age, especially legal age at marriage for both male and female widely varies around the world cultures (United Nations 1988; 1990. Early marriage tends to occur in the rural and minority families in the developing and under-developed cultures, and many women become mother before the legal age of marriage (Asaduzzaman 2009; Billari, Prskawetz, and Furnkranz 2002; Balestrino and Ciardi 2007; Choe, Thapa, and Mishra 2004; Field and Ambrus 2006; Khambalia, Choudhury, and Zlotkin 2006; Majumder 2005, Matsuo, Banerjee and Hutter, 2004; Singh, 2006; Saikia, Steele, and Dasvarma 2009). The legal age of marriage in Bangladesh is 19 years for female and 21 years for male, but research reveals that ideal age at marriage and parenthood varies according residence, class, caste, religion, ethnicity etc (Aziz and Maloney 1985). In one cross-cultural study Uddin (2006) found that ideal age at marriage for both male and female and parenthood in the Santal culture was earlier than in the Muslim culture.

In patriarchal communities the father, or an elder member, holds authority in the family (Sarker 1997; Uddin and Arefin 2007). As he gradually declines physically he places authority on a mature son who is able to conduct and manage the family. When family authority will be assigned on son depends on cultural age norms (Uddin 2006). Uddin (2006) found that about 8 percent of the Muslim and 17 percent of the Santal parents opined that when a son became 20-24 years, parents would assign authority on him, 50 percent of the Muslim and 62 percent of the Santal considered appropriate age for authority assignment was 25-29 years, but 37 percent of the Muslim and 20 percent of the Santal thought of suitable age of authority assignment was 30 years and above.

The findings of the current study are congruent with cross-cultural studies suggesting that minority status, low rate of modernization and severe poverty among the Santal people compared to majority status, moderate rate of modernization and relative poverty among the Muslim in rural Bangladesh influence early age ascription across the family life for human adaptation. Further cross-cultural study should be done on the correlates of differences in age ascription between Santal and Muslim cultures in rural ecological system of Bangladesh.

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