

Menarche and Menopause Among The Ahom Women of Dibrugarh, Assam

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ABSTRACT Investigation on the onset of menarche and menopause among the Ahom women is reported. Results are compared with those of the other populations of Assam. It emerges out from the analysis that the present Ahom sample not only akin to other Mongoloid groups but also shows close (statistical) affinity with several Caucasoid (Castes) groups of high social status.

INTRODUCTION

The first menstrual cycle or menarche and complete cessation of menstrual flow and ovulation or menopause are two most important events in women's life, and they are accompanied by many morphological and physiological changes in the body. It has been observed by a number of investigators that the age at menarche and age at menopause vary widely within and between populations because of multitude of factors like nutrition, socio-economic status, environment, altitude, climate, heredity, food-habits, rural-urban residence, family size, etc. Therefore, both the menarcheal and the menopausal ages are of considerable importance to students of anthropology.

The present study aims to examine the menarcheal and menopausal ages among the Ahom females from Dibrugarh, Assam. An attempt has also been made to evaluate the level of difference in these traits among different ethnic groups in Brahmaputra valley of Assam. In Assam, the Ahom are offshoot of the Tai or Shan group, who migrated from Burma in 1228 A.D. Though widely scattered, at present Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Jorhat, Sibsagar districts are the main abode of the

Ahoms. They have already forgotten their Tai language and adopted Assamese. Nowadays, they are followers of Hinduism (both Vaishnavite and Sakta) while the other Tai population groups of Assam are Buddhist by religion.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Data from 192 and 87 women belonging to the Ahom population of Dibrugarh were collected for menarcheal and menopausal ages, respectively. Data on menopausal age were collected from those women who had completed their reproductive life without adopting any birth control measures. All individuals were healthy and unrelated. Information was obtained from the subject by retrospective method depending on recall. The t-test was used to find out the significance of inter-and intra-group differences between the mean values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the data reveals that the maximum number of Ahom girls attained menarche at the age of 12 years (45.83%), the range of variation being 9 to 17 years with mean menarcheal age being 12.51 ± 0.10 years. Montegu (1945) was of the opinion that the menarche before 12 years of age is abnormal. As such the frequency of abnormality in the present sample is 15.63%. In the present study, the maximum frequency of menopausal age of the Ahom women is found at the age of 48 years (19.54%), the mean age being 46.32 ± 0.27 years. The range of variation in them is between 40 and 52 years.

The mean menarcheal age of the present Ahom sample along with other published works on the tribes and castes (having Mongoloid and Caucasoid ethnic elements) of Brahmaputra valley, Assam are considered for the present comparative study. It is apparent from these works that, in general, the females belonging to Mongoloid groups experience menarche at comparatively later ages than the Caucasoid (mostly castes) populations of Assam (Sengupta and Gogoi, 1993). It is also noteworthy that there are good deal of variation among the populations under consideration. The mean menarcheal age of the present Ahom sample (12.51 ± 0.10 years) is found not to be in statistical agreement with that obtained on the same population by Gogoi (1972, 12.96 ± 0.06 years) and Das (1983-1986, 12.83 ± 0.12 years) with only exception of the Ahom data (12.60 ± 0.12 years) reported by Sengupta (1985). They also deviate significantly from the Turung (13.06 ± 0.02 years) but shows close affinity with Khamiyang (12.80 ± 0.13 years) reported by Das (1985), interestingly both belongs to Tai Mongoloid groups like that of the Ahom.

It is worth mentioning that the mean menarcheal age of the present Ahom sample closely resemble with the Brahmin (12.51 ± 0.11 , Das and Das, 1967; 12.53 ± 0.08 years, Das 1983-1986); Kayastha (12.45 ± 0.20 , Rakshit, 1960); Kalita (12.12 ± 0.25 , Rakshit, 1960; 12.61 ± 0.14 , Das and Das, 1967; 12.51 ± 0.07 , Das 1983-1986); Kumar (12.49 ± 0.08) and Jogi (12.31 ± 0.08) both reported by Das and Sengupta (1984), Kaibarta (12.98 ± 0.65 , Das et al., 1980a; 12.44 ± 0.10 , Das and Sengupta, 1984; 12.76 ± 0.11 , Das, 1992; 12.71 ± 0.09 , Sengupta and Gogoi, 1993) despite the fact of having Mongoloid ethnic elements in the former.

Turning to other population sample on the basis of existing literature, the mean menarcheal age of the present Ahom sample is significantly low when compared with the Assamese Muslim (13.35 ± 0.14) recorded by

Rakshit (1960); Baishya (12.97 ± 0.12) and Kaibarta (12.89 ± 0.12) studied by Das and Das (1967); Brahmin (13.59 ± 0.07) and Kalita (13.14 ± 0.05) investigated by Das et al. (1980a); Brahmin (13.23 ± 0.07), Kayastha (13.07 ± 0.04), Kalita (12.79 ± 0.05) and Muslim (12.84 ± 0.04) reported by Das and Sengupta (1984); and markedly high compared to urban Kaibarta (11.78 ± 0.09) recorded by Das (1992).

The mean values of menarcheal age in a few Mongoloid populations reported earlier such as Sonowal (12.77 ± 0.12 , Deka, 1976); Mikir (12.75 ± 0.18 , Khatoniar, 1972); Lalung (12.36 ± 0.06 , Das et al., 1980b) do not deviate significantly from the present Ahom sample. Same is true with regard to the figure obtained on the pooled Assamese population (12.36 ± 0.42) by Banerjee (1972). Several other Mongoloid populations of Assam like the Deuri (13.03 years); the Chutiya (12.54 years); the Moran (13.51 years); the Mishing (12.68 years) and also one sample of Ahom (12.29 years) studied by Das et al. (1980 c) are also not much distinct from the present Ahom sample.

In the present study, contrary to the World wide trend towards the decline in mean menarcheal age, a perceptable trend towards increase in the mean ages at menarche in Ahom has been noted, *i.e.* from 11.65 years (Srivastava and Goswami, 1968) to 12.60 years (Sengupta, 1985).

Studies on the menopausal age of the women of Assam are rather scanty. A comparison with the available information on the mean menopausal age of Ahom (46.32 ± 0.27 years) and other populations of Assam indicates comparatively higher mean menopausal age in the former population. The results of significance test reveals that with the only exception of the Khamiyang (46.25 ± 1.58 ; Das, 1985), a Tai Mongoloid population of Assam, the present Ahom sample having higher mean value and stand significantly apart from the Turung (44.30 ± 0.68 ; Das,

1985) as well as Kaibarta (42.95 ± 0.69 ; Sengupta and Gogoi, 1993); women of Assam (40.32 ± 3.42 ; Singh et al., 1980) and being low even from one Ahom sample (48.44 ± 0.59) reported earlier by Gogoi (1972) from Dibrugarh.

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