

Age at Menarche Among the Oraons of Assam

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INTRODUCTION

The menarcheal age constitutes an important aspect of population dynamics. Wide variation in menstrual cycle, is reported to be caused by the interaction of number of factors like heredity, nutrition, food habits, environment, climate, altitude, socio-economic status, rural-urban residence, family size etc., and as such they are of considerable interest to the students of anthropology, population genetics and human biology.

The present note aims to investigate the mean age at menarche among the Oraon tea garden labourers of Assam, who are relatively older in settlement as well as populous in numerical strength. At present they are mainly working as tea garden labourers but majority are still sticking to their traditional agricultural occupation and living in adjacent villages of the tea gardens in Assam.

The Oraon is a Dravidian speaking population and is believed to have migrated from Southern India and settled in the Chotanagpur plateau (Dalton, 1872; Hunter, 1877; Risley, 1891; Roy, 1915) many centuries ago. They are commonly known as Kurukh, Dhangar, Oraon etc. in different places. In Assam, they identify themselves as Urang. Their major concentration is in the Ranchi district of Bihar, however, they are also found in West Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh besides in a number of tea-gardens of Assam.

In Assam, majority of the Oraon identify themselves as Hindu (Sansari), while the Oraons subscribing to Christian faith are also considerable in number. It is reported that inter-action between these two segments of Oraon is very limited in their day to day life, as well as in socio-religious celebrations. The Hindu Oraons have been reported to avoid inter-dining and matrimonial alliances with the Christian counterpart. The data have been presented in this note is

therefore on the basis of religious affiliation and place of residence.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Data on menarcheal age were collected at random from 220 married Oraon women of whom 122 are from tea gardens (Hindu – 72, Christian – 50) and 98 from ex-tea garden labour settlements (Hindu – 52, Christian – 46). For this study six tea gardens – Basmotia, Hatiali, Kailaspur, Lengrai, Nandanban, Timakpho Tea Estates and four ex tea garden labour settlements – Basapather, Dihinghula, Siringhula, Bamunikuriha gaon in Madarkhat and Tengakhat Circle under Dibrugarh district were selected. All individuals were healthy and unrelated. Information was obtained from the subjects by retrospective method depending on recall. In few cases, age of the informants were estimated with reference to some important local events. However, most of them knew the month and year of the first menstruation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the data reveals that the maximum number of Oraon girls attained menarche at the age of 13 years, the range of variation being 11 to 15 years. Montegu (1955) is of the opinion that the menarche before 12 years of age is abnormal. The frequency of such abnormality in the present sub-samples of Oraon ranges in between 9.72 to 22.00 per cent

Although there is no significant difference in respect of mean age at menarche in the Oraon sub-samples with residence and religious affiliation, yet the Hindu Oraon in both the settings are found to attain their menarche relatively late as compared to Christian Oraons. The mean age at menarche is also found to be slightly higher in Oraon women from tea garden than the women from ex-tea garden Oraon settlement.

Table 1 : Percentage distribution of menarcheal age among the Oraon

Age in years	Ex tea garden Oraons		Oraons of Tea Garden	
	Hindu (N=52)	Christian (N=46)	Hindu (N=72)	Christian (N=50)
11	5.76	4.35	5.56	4.00
12	7.69	8.70	4.17	18.00
13	46.15	58.69	41.67	40.00
14	30.77	26.09	45.83	34.00
15	9.62	2.17	2.78	4.00

Table 2: Mean age at menarche among the Oraon

	Hindu	Christian
Ex tea garden Oraon	13.31 + 0.13	13.13 + 0.11
Tea Garden Oraon	13.36 + 0.10	13.16 + 0.13
Oraon (Pooled)	13.34 + 0.08	13.15 + 0.11

The mean menarcheal age of the present Oraon sample (13.26 + 0.08 years) is not much distinct from the migrant Oraon of the Andaman island (13.47 + 0.14 years; Bhattacharyya et al., 1985), but are relatively low compared to the sample reported from the tribes (Oraon, Munda and Santhal) of central region of India (14.65 years; Wilson et al., 1953).

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