

Age at Menarche and Menopause Among the Sonowal Women of Dibrugarh, Assam

Mondira Kalita¹ and Sarthak Sengupta²

1. Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh 786 004, Assam, India

2. Department of Anthropology, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong 793 014, Meghalaya, India

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ABSTRACT Investigation on the onset of menarche and menopause among the Sonowal tribe of Assam is reported. Results were also compared with those of the other populations of Assam having Mongoloid ethnic affinity.

INTRODUCTION

The menarche and menopause are two most important events in women's life, and they are accompanied by many morphological and physiological changes in the body. The mean age at menarche and menopause vary widely within and between populations because of multitude 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 importance to students of anthropology, population genetics, and human biology.

The present note aims to investigate the menarcheal and menopausal ages among the Sonowal of Dibrugarh, Assam. The results were compared with different ethnic groups of Brahmaputra valley, Assam having Mongoloid affinities to evaluate the level of similarities or differences in these variables. The Sonowal, one of the endogamous branch of Kachari tribe just as the tribes like the Boró, Dimasa, Barman, Hojai, Mech, Thengal, Semsá etc., is a plain scheduled tribe of Assam with Mongoloid affinity. At present they are concentrated mainly in the districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. The present day Sonowal have already forgotten their Bodo language and adopted Assamese as their mother tongue.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Data on menarcheal age (N=200) and age at menopause (N=66) were collected from Sonowal women at random mainly from Dibrugarh town and its neighbouring villages. 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. Data on menopausal age were collected from those women who had completed their reproductive life without adopting any birth control measures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the Sonowal comparatively early onset of menarche (12.45±0.10 years) and relative late age at menopause (47.22±0.29 years) allows quite high reproductive span. Sengupta and Gogoi (1993) reported that in general the females belonging to tribal groups of Assam having Mongoloid ethnic affinities experience menarche at comparatively later ages than the caste populations having Caucasoid ethnic strains. The results obtained in this study are not in agreement with the observation made earlier.

The menarcheal age of the Sonowal sample (12.45±0.10 years) is found not to be in statistical agreement with that obtained on the same population by Deka (1976; 12.77±0.12 years). It seems that variation observed in the above two samples may be due to micro socio-cultural variations, mainly due to rural (Deka, 1976) urban (present sample) residence. The present

sample also deviate significantly from one Ahom sample (12.83 ± 0.12 years, Das 1983-1986) as well as Turung (13.06 ± 0.20 years, Das, 1985) and Khamiyang (12.80 ± 0.13 years, Das 1985) - all belongs to Tai Mongoloid groups. However, close resemblance with the Ahom (12.96 ± 0.60 years, Gogoi, 1972; 12.60 ± 0.12 years, Sengupta, 1985), Lalung (12.36 ± 0.06 years, Das et al., 1980a) and Mikir population (12.75 ± 0.18 years, Khatoniar, 1972) is highly noteworthy. Several other Mongoloid populations of Assam like the Chutiya (12.54 years), Mishing (12.68 years), Moran (12.51 years) studied by Das et al. (1980b) also not much distinct from the Sonowal. The mean age at menarche among the Deori (13.06 years, Das et al., 1980b) however, relatively high compared to the present Sonowal sample.

A comparison on the mean menopausal age of Sonowal (47.22 ± 0.29 years) with the available information on other Mongoloid 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 years; Das, 1985), a Tai Mongol-

oid population of Assam, the present Sonowal sample stand significantly apart from the Ahom (48.44 ± 0.52 years, Gogoi, 1972) and Turung (44.30 ± 0.66 years, Das, 1985) population.

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