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## Dental age estimation in forensic and anthropological research: Indian perspectives and methodological approaches

Sadhna Verma

Department of Anthropology, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

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### Abstract

Dental age estimation is a cornerstone of forensic science, anthropology, pediatric dentistry, and orthodontics. Teeth, due to their durability, hardness, and predictable developmental patterns, serve as reliable indicators of biological and chronological age. This paper provides a comprehensive review of dental anatomy, eruption chronology, temporary and permanent dentition, and methods of age estimation. Emphasis is given to the Indian population, reflecting socio-cultural, dietary, and genetic factors that influence dental development. Practical guidelines for age assessment across life stages are discussed. The study also highlights recent technological advancements, including digital radiography and 3D imaging, which enhance precision in forensic and anthropological investigations. Integration of traditional methods with modern techniques offers robust, multi-modal protocols suitable for forensic applications, pediatric treatment planning, and anthropological research.

**Keywords:** Dental age estimation, forensic odontology, indian anthropology, tooth eruption, radiography, histology, aspartic acid racemization, pediatric dentistry

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### Introduction

Age determination is a critical component in forensic investigations, legal disputes, anthropological studies, and clinical dentistry. Accurate age assessment is crucial for

- Identifying unknown individuals in medico-legal cases.
- Resolving age disputes in criminal, sports, and immigration matters.
- Guiding orthodontic and pediatric dental treatment planning.
- Studying population growth patterns, nutrition, and evolutionary trends.

### Teeth are uniquely suited for age estimation because

1. They are the hardest structures in the body, resistant to decay and environmental degradation.
2. Dental development is less influenced by malnutrition or hormonal disorders than skeletal development.
3. Incremental growth lines in enamel and dentin record developmental history.

### In the Indian context, dental age estimation is particularly significant due to

- Frequent legal disputes related to juvenile justice and sports eligibility.
- Diverse populations with genetic, dietary, and socio-cultural variations affecting growth.
- Integration of traditional anthropological methods with modern forensic odontology.

This paper presents a detailed overview of dental age estimation methods, practical guidelines, and recent technological innovations with relevance to Indian forensic and anthropological research.

### Dental Anatomy and Development

#### 1. Structure of Teeth

Teeth consist of mineralized and soft tissues that allow age estimation

- a. **Enamel:** Hardest tissue; preserves microscopic growth lines.
- b. **Dentin:** Tubular tissue beneath enamel; shows secondary dentin deposition with age.
- c. **Pulp:** Living tissue; volume decreases with age, aiding in adult age estimation.
- d. **Cementum:** Covers root; incremental lines indicate chronological age.
- e. **Periodontal ligament:** Connects tooth to alveolar bone; resorption patterns assist adult age estimation.

#### 2. Types and Numbers of Teeth

- **Deciduous (Temporary) Teeth:** 20 teeth, erupt from 6 months to ~2 years.

- **Permanent Teeth:** 32 teeth, including third molars, erupt by ~18 years.

**Table 1: Human Teeth and Eruption Timeline**

Tooth Type	Temporary Dentition	Permanent Dentition	Function
Central Incisor	6–10 months	6–8 years	Cutting
Lateral Incisor	9–13 months	7–9 years	Cutting
Canine	16–23 months	9–12 years	Tearing
First Molar	13–19 months	6–7 years	Grinding
Second Molar	23–33 months	11–13 years	Grinding
Third Molar	--	17–25 years	Optional, late eruption

**Table 2: Morphological Differences Between Temporary and Permanent Teeth**

Feature	Temporary Teeth	Permanent Teeth
Size	Smaller (except molars)	Larger overall
Crown Color	Chalky white	Ivory/cream white
Root Length	Shorter, divergent	Longer, stronger
Orientation	Vertical	Slightly inclined forward
Cervical Ridge	Present	Absent
Tooth Germ in Radiograph	Visible	Not visible

### Dental Eruption Chronology

#### 1. Temporary Dentition

- **Central incisors:** 6–10 months
- **Lateral incisors:** 9–13 months
- **First molars:** 13–19 months
- **Canines:** 16–23 months
- **Second molars:** 23–33 months

#### 2. Permanent Dentition

- **First molars:** 6–7 years
- **Central incisors:** 6–8 years
- **Lateral incisors:** 7–9 years
- **Canines:** 9–12 years
- **Premolars:** 9–12 years
- **Second molars:** 11–13 years
- **Third molars:** 17–25 years

**Mixed dentition period (6–12 years) is crucial for pediatric age estimation.**

### Methods of Dental Age Estimation

#### 1. Clinical or Visual Observation

- Assess tooth eruption, alignment, and attrition.
- Useful in field studies and when radiographs are unavailable.
- **Limitation:** Observer-dependent and less precise.

#### 2. Radiographic Methods

- Evaluate crown and root formation, mineralization, and developmental stage.
- **Common radiographs:** OPG, periapical, bitewing.
- **Demirjian method:** Scores seven mandibular teeth into 8 stages (A–H) for age estimation.

#### 3. Histological Methods

- Examine incremental enamel and dentin lines.
- Neonatal lines indicate birth; Retzius and Von Ebner lines reveal growth periodicity.
- Precise for prenatal, neonatal, and early postnatal age estimation.

#### 4. Biochemical and Physical Methods

- **Aspartic acid racemization:** L- to D-aspartic acid ratio correlates with chronological age.
- **Fluorescence analysis:** Color intensity of dentin/cementum increases with age.

- **Mineral analysis:** Fluoride, strontium, and lead deposition patterns as age indicators.

### Age Estimation Across Life Stages

#### 1. Prenatal and Neonatal

- Mineralization begins 2–4 months in utero.
- Neonatal lines and incremental dentin lines allow precise age determination.

#### 2. Children and Adolescents

- Tooth eruption and calcification are reliable markers.
- Third molars assist in estimating 16–20-year age group.
- Radiographic scoring improves precision.

#### 3. Adults

- **Gustafson method (1950)** <sup>[5]</sup>: Evaluates attrition, secondary dentin, cementum deposition, root resorption, periodontal ligament migration, and transparency.
- **Modified methods:** Johanson, Kashyap & Koteswara Rao increase accuracy.
- **Non-invasive methods:** Aspartic acid racemization and fluorescence analysis.

**Table 3:** Practical Age Estimation Guidelines from Eruption Patterns

Observed Tooth Condition	Estimated Age (Years)
First permanent molar erupted	≥6
Second permanent molar erupted	~12
Third molar erupted	17–18
Permanent incisors in mixed dentition	6–9
Permanent premolars erupted	9–12
Permanent canine erupted	11–12
Second molar aligning in socket	~16
Third molar below occlusal line	~18

### Applications in India

- **Juvenile Justice Cases:** Radiographs for legal age verification in courts.
- **Sports Eligibility Verification:** Dental age assessment for age-restricted competitions.
- **Anthropological Studies:** Tribal and regional populations studied using eruption patterns to analyze growth trends and nutrition.

### Discussion

Dental age estimation integrates biological, environmental, and socio-cultural factors. In India, diet, genetics, and cultural practices influence tooth eruption and development. Modern techniques such as digital radiography and 3D imaging enhance precision while maintaining non-invasive approaches. Combining traditional methods with modern innovations improves reliability in forensic, clinical, and anthropological applications.

### Conclusion

Dental age estimation is a robust and reliable tool in forensic science, anthropology, and pediatric dentistry. Teeth accurately reflect life stages across populations. Modern digital and biochemical techniques complement classical methods, offering multi-modal, non-invasive, and precise age determination. These approaches are particularly relevant in India for legal, clinical, and anthropological applications.

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