

Zoom in (Ctrl+Plus)

## Digging deep

# Latest discoveries throw light on ancestors

**Kalyan Ray**

**Two types of early humans with distinct physical features may have lived in the Narmada valley in central India thousands of years ago, a team of anthropologists has claimed.**

While one category was “short and stocky” people who hunted small animals with relatively modern stone and bone tools, the other group was made of large-bodied people who hunted down big mammals with archaic and big weapons of stone.

Indian anthropologists, who collected fossil evidences to prove the presence of two groups, claimed that “short and stocky” people could be the ancestors of short-bodied people of south Asia, including pygmies.

The fossils were found in Netankheri in central Narmada valley in Madhya Pradesh. The site is close to Hathnora, where paleontologist in Geological Survey of India Arun Sonakia found the fossil of a human skull, which remains the



only known fossil of a human ancestor from South Asia so far.

Researchers from Kolkata and Pune found a fossilised arm bone (“humerus”) of the “short and stocky” group and a partial thigh bone (femur) of one of the larger-bodied people.

The discovery, when studied together with previous human fossils found in the valley, suggests presence of two types of people with different physical features.

The antiquity of the fossils, however, is not definite as none of them, including the Narmada skull, has been tested to establish a date. Instead, the researchers relied on indirect evidences like fossils of other species and the age of rock layers to determine fossils’ age.

“The human humerus fossil from Netankheri is tentatively 80,000 years old, which is supported by faunal and archaeological evidence,” Anek Ram Sankhyan, who led a team of researchers that found the fossils, told Deccan Herald.

The research was published in the August issue of the journal, *Advances in Anthropology*.

Sankhyan, who retired recently from the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI), claimed that scholars have tentatively fixed the age of Hathnora skull between 2,00,000 to 3,00,000 centuries and the same applies to the femur bone since both were derived from the same stratigraphic level (rock layers) and likely belong to the same or similar archaic human.

The date is supported by the faunal and archaeological evidences. **DH News Service**