

hindustantimes

Kolkata / METRO | ₹2.50 | Vol. XII No. 295 | 20 pages, including 4 pages of HT City

MONDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2012

NIFTY 5407.7 -4.5 | SENSEX 19,242 +11.1 | DOW JONES 13,198.8 +0.4 | NASDAQ 3,021 +1.7 | RUPEE/US \$ 61.1 -1.1 | RUPEE/EURO 72.8 -2 | GOLD/10G 34,470 -1.7 | SILVER/K 67,750 -4.5

Pygmies migrated from India

FINDING Experts say the 'short and stocky' race lived in MP 80,000 years ago

Joydeep Thakur

letters@hindustantimes.com

KOLKATA: A part of a fossilised arm bone measuring just over three inches has taken a team of experts from the Anthropological Survey of India to the threshold of one of the most dramatic discoveries in the field of human evolution.

AR Sankhyan, a retired scientist of the ASI, Kolkata, and the lead investigator of the project, told HT, "The fossilised evidence suggests that African pygmies could have originated from a 'short and stocky' race of people

who lived in Madhya Pradesh's central Narmada Valley more than 80,000 years ago."

If the hypothesis is sustained after further scrutiny, this could be a landmark discovery in anthropology and human evolution.

A team of experts from Kolkata and Pune found several bones in 2009-10, but it took them a couple of years to firm up on their findings. Working in Narmada Valley, the team of seven paleo-anthropologists from the Anthropological Survey of India in Kolkata and two other institutions in Pune and Himachal Pradesh discovered fossilised



■ A pygmy girl

bones of early human beings, known as archaic Hominids.

"We found a humerus (arm

bone) which belongs to a 'short and stocky' race of people. These could be the ancestors of the short-bodied people of South Asia, those found in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and African pygmies," Sankhyan said.

The fossils were found in Netankheri, along the northern bank of the Narmada. The site is close to Hathnora, where Geological Survey of India paleontologist Arun Sonakia found the fossil of a human skull in the 1980s, which remained the only known fossil of a human ancestor from South Asia so far.

CONTINUED ON P4

AFRICAN PYGMIES ORIGINATED IN INDIA

CONTINUED FROM P1

"The recent finds also points out to another interesting side of human evolution. Two types of early humans with distinct physical features may have lived in the Narmada valley in central India thousands of years ago," Sankhyan said.

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.

"While the larger-bodied

humans evolved first, they were replaced by the shorter pygmy-like people later. Probably the pygmy-like people exterminated the larger bodied people and then migrated to other pastures, including Africa," he added.

Sankhyan also pointed out that the present findings would have several implications in understanding human evolution in South Asia.

"The pygmy-like people might have even survived the 'Volcanic Winter', which followed the world's largest volcanic activity till date - the Toba Volcano" The Toba supereruption was a supervolcanic eruption that is thought to have occurred sometime between 69,000 and 77,000 years ago at Lake Toba in Sumatra. It is recognized as one of the Earth's largest known eruptions. This event plunged the planet into a 6-to-10-year volcanic winter.

Sankhyan also said this recent find is just a part of the study and that a huge collection made by him as principal investigator of the Narmada Project that ended in 2010 lies unstudied in Kolkata.

"I proposed to undertake a thorough study under a fellowship and to produce 3-4 volumes on the collection. But, the AnSI is silent on it for more than one-and-a-half year. In October 2012, I had requested for a small tour of six weeks to update and gather more information but the AnSI authorities denied that opportunity," he added.

hindustantimes

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2012

New Delhi/MHTD 1155 00000 to 204 1 Post 1.50 1.40 page Area code program
MUMBAI 2,200.0 +6.1 | SONEBT 2,200.1 +6.1 | DOW JONES 12,960.0 -20.5 | NASDAQ 3,420.0 -2.4 | NIFTY 5,155.0 +6.1 | BSE 10,727.0 +6.1 | GOLD 1,903.00 +2.00 | SILVER 65.00 -0.00

HUMAN EVOLUTION

African pygmies may have roots in Narmada valley, says new study

Joydeep Thakur
| levers@hindustantimes.com

KOLKATA: A part of a fossilized arm bone measuring just more than three inches in length has led a team of experts from the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) to the threshold of one of the most dramatic discoveries in the field of human evolution and migration across continents.

"The fossilized evidence suggests that African pygmies could have originated from a 'short and stocky' race of people who lived in the central Narmada Valley in Madhya Pradesh more than 80,000 years ago," AR Sankhyan, a retired scientist of AnSI in Kolkata and the lead investigator of the project told HT.

The team of experts found the bones in 2010 and it has taken them two years to firm up their findings.



Illustration: JAYANTO

Working in the Narmada valley, a team of seven paleo-anthropologists from Kolkata and two other institutions in Pune and Himachal Pradesh discovered the fossilized bone of early human beings known as archaic Hominids.

"We found a humerus (arm bone) which belongs to a 'short and stocky' race of people. These could be the ancestors of the short-bodied people of south Asia, those found in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and African pygmies," Sankhyan said.

The fossils were found in Netankheri along the northern bank of River Narmada.

"The finds also points out to another interesting side of human evolution. Two types of early humans with distinct physical features may have lived in the

Narmada valley in central India thousands of years ago," Sankhyan added.

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

"Probably the pygmy-like people exterminated the larger bodied people and then migrated to other pastures including Africa," he added.