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Q2(c)

Discuss the morphological features and phylogenetic Position of Ramapithecus

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Palaeo-Anthropological evidences from India with special reference to Siwaliks and Narmada basin (Ramapithecus, Sivapithecus and Narmada Man).

1.2 Palaeo-Anthropological evidences from India with special reference to Siwaliks and Narmada basin (Ramapithecus, Sivapithecus and Narmada Man).

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the morphology and phylogenetic position of Ramapithecus
- Keep the answer to a 15-mark length of about 200 words

Revision summary

Ramapithecus was based on Siwalik jaws with **thick enamel** and reduced canines.

Lewis and later writers treated it as an early hominin.

Better **Sivapithecus** faces are orang-like, and the jaws join that genus.

Thick enamel is dietary, not a human patent.

Phylogeny now puts the group with Pongo, not with Homo.

Introduction

Ramapithecus was named from Siwalik jaw fragments and once sold as an early hominin. Morphology now places those fossils with **Sivapithecus**, on the orangutan side of the ape tree, not on the human line.

Body

Morphology as first read

- **G. E. Lewis** (1930s) described small Siwalik jaws with a parabolic-looking dental arcade, **thick enamel**, and reduced canines relative to great apes then known.
- **Those traits were read as hominin:** **thick enamel** for hard food, a short face, and a supposed upright trend.
- The hypodigm was jaws and teeth. There was no good pelvis, foot, or complete cranium for Ramapithecus as a separate walker.

Why the phylogeny moved

- Fuller **Sivapithecus** faces from the Siwaliks show orang-like concave profiles and nasal form. Ramapithecus jaws fit that genus as females or small individuals.
- **Thick enamel** is a dietary trait shared by several Miocene apes. It is not a hominin patent.
- Molecular clocks put the human-chimpanzee split far later than classic Ramapithecus dates, so a mid-Miocene hominin in the Siwaliks became unlikely.

Present position

- **Teaching phylogeny:** *Sivapithecus* (including former *Ramapithecus*) is a **Pongo** relative. African hominins are a separate later branch.
- Indian palaeoanthropology still uses the name in older papers. The phylogenetic claim of a direct human ancestor is dropped.

Flow diagram

Ramapithecus jaws -> Once hominin claim
Ramapithecus jaws -> Now Sivapithecus
Now Sivapithecus -> Pongo clade
Hominins -> Later African branch

Conclusion

Ramapithecus morphology was a small thick-enamelled Siwalik jaw. Phylogenetically it is folded into *Sivapithecus* as an orangutan-clade ape, not a hominin.

Facts & figures

G. E. Lewis

Named *Ramapithecus* from Siwalik specimens in the 1930s.

Sivapithecus

Siwalik ape into which *Ramapithecus* is now generally sunk.

Thick enamel

Dental trait once used for hominin status, now read as diet among several Miocene apes.

Pongo clade

Orangutan lineage; the present phylogenetic home of *Sivapithecus*.