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Q6(c)

"Siwalik deposits show a variety of Neogene fossil primates." Critically examine.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

Core demand of the question

- Critically examine the statement that Siwalik deposits show a variety of Neogene fossil primates
- State the stratigraphy, taxa, and limits of the sample
- Keep Narmada separate
- Give a balanced verdict

Revision summary

Siwaliks are Himalayan foreland molasse from Miocene into the Pleistocene.

Neogene primate fossils centre on **Sivapithecus** and large Indopithecus or Gigantopithecus.

Haritalyangar, Ramnagar, and Potwar Chinji are key localities.

Ramapithecus is not a hominin; faces align with orangutans.

Variety is real but fragmentary; Narmada Hathnora is not part of this fauna.

Introduction

The Siwalik Group is a Neogene to early Quaternary molasse along the Himalayan front. It does yield several fossil primates, especially Miocene hominoids. The statement is true in outline and must be qualified on variety, preservation, and what those primates are not.

Body

Deposits and time

- **Teaching order: Lower Siwaliks (Kamlial-Chinji), Middle (Nagri-Dhok Pathan), Upper (Tatrot-Pinjor-Boulder Conglomerate).**
- Neogene covers Miocene and Pliocene. Chinji and Nagri beds are the main hominoid windows. Pinjor is later and richer in other mammals.
- Fossils sit in river sands and clays. They are often teeth and jaw fragments, not complete skeletons.

The primate variety

- **Sivapithecus** (including former Ramapithecus) is the principal large ape, with an orang-like face. **Haritalyangar**, Potwar Chinji, and **Ramnagar** are localities.

- Large forms classed as **Indopithecus** or Siwalik Gigantopithecus (e.g. *G. giganteus*) add a giant ape, not a human.
- Smaller catarrhines and some cercopithecoids appear in later lists; many are poorly preserved and taxonomically unstable.
- A diverse ungulate-proboscidean fauna dates the primates by association (**Pilgrim, Colbert**, later **S. R. K. Chopra** and Chandigarh teams).

Critical limits

- "Variety" is real at family and genus level for hominoids, not a rainforest full of living monkey species.
- Surface mixes and old collections inflated names. **Robin Dennell** and later workers urge caution on mixed terraces.
- **Ramapithecus as hominin** is rejected. Variety is Asian ape variety, not a set of human ancestors.
- **Hathnora** (Narmada) is not a Siwalik primate fauna.

Verdict

- The statement is acceptable if Neogene Siwaliks are credited with **Sivapithecus**, large Indopithecus/Gigantopithecus, and some smaller catarrhines.
- It is misleading if it implies a rich, well-dated primate community or an Indian human origin.

Flow diagram

Lower Chinji -> Middle Nagri
 Middle Nagri -> Sivapithecus
 Middle Nagri -> Indopithecus Gigantopithecus
 Sivapithecus -> Pongine line
 Upper Pinjor -> Later mammals cercopithecoids

Conclusion

Siwalik deposits do show several Neogene fossil primates, led by **Sivapithecus** and giant ape forms. Variety is modest, preservation is fragmentary, and the fauna is pongine, not hominin. The statement survives as a cautious summary, not as a boast.

Facts & figures

Chinji-Nagri

Lower to Middle Siwalik units that yield the main Miocene hominoid sample.

Sivapithecus

Dominant large ape of the Siwaliks, facially close to the orangutan.

Indopithecus / *G. giganteus*

Very large Siwalik hominoid, related to the Gigantopithecus problem, not to Homo.

Haritalyangar

Himachal locality central to Indian Sivapithecus and giant ape jaws.

Pilbeam revision

Showed that Ramapithecus belongs with Sivapithecus, ending its hominin status.

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