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Q5(b)

Taxonomic status of Ramapithecus in the light of Ramapithecus-Sivapithecus controversy.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Anthropology GS 2 · 10 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

- State who Ramapithecus was in the old story
- State the Sivapithecus face and why it swallowed Ramapithecus
- Give the present taxonomic status
- Name the Siwalik localities that drove the debate

Revision summary

Lewis named Ramapithecus from Siwalik jaws; Simons and Pilbeam once put it on the human line.

Sivapithecus faces from Potwar and Haritalyangar are orang-like, not australopith-like.

Ramapithecus is now folded into Sivapithecus; it is not a hominin.

The lesson is not to read human ancestry from a jaw fragment alone.

Gigantopithecus/Indopithecus is a separate large ape, also not Homo.

Introduction

Ramapithecus was, for two decades, the textbook Miocene hominin of India. **Sivapithecus** was the more ape-like cousin from the same Siwaliks. The controversy ended when better faces showed they were one orang-related ape, not a human ancestor plus a side branch.

Body

The old Ramapithecus

G. E. Lewis (1930s) named Ramapithecus punjabicus from Siwalik jaws. Small canines and a somewhat parabolic dental arcade were read as hominin. **Elwyn Simons** and **David Pilbeam** in the 1960s-70s placed Ramapithecus on the line to Australopithecus, at about 14-8 million years. Indian nationalism and school charts liked an Indian "first man".

The Sivapithecus correction

New **Sivapithecus** faces from Potwar and Haritalyangar showed a **concave, orang-like midface**, tall central incisors, and not a human nasal opening. Jaws once called Ramapithecus fitted the same genus. **Pilbeam publicly revised the story: Ramapithecus is not** a hominin. The valid name for most of this material is **Sivapithecus**, a **pongine** (orangutan

clade) ape.

Some workers still discuss species splits inside Sivapithecus (S. indicus, S. sivalensis, S. parvada). **Gigantopithecus / Indopithecus** remains a separate large ape. None of these is Homo.

Status now

Taxonomic status of Ramapithecus: junior synonym / abandoned hominin genus; specimens reassigned mainly to **Sivapithecus**. **Phylogeny:** sister to **Pongo**, not to African apes and humans. The African hominin line after the split is not a Siwalik story.

- **The controversy teaches method: a jaw is not a face**, and **dental "human" traits** can evolve in apes. Chopra's Chandigarh school supplied much of the Indian evidence that made the revision possible.

Flow diagram

Ramapithecus old -> Hominin claim
Sivapithecus face -> Orang line
Ramapithecus old -> Sivapithecus face
Hominin claim -> rejected Not human ancestor

Conclusion

Ramapithecus does not survive as a hominin taxon. Siwalik "Ramapithecus" teeth sit inside Sivapithecus, on the orangutan line. The controversy is closed as ancestry, open only as species-chopping inside Sivapithecus.

Facts & figures

G. E. Lewis

Named Ramapithecus from Siwalik material in the 1930s on the basis of jaws and teeth.

David Pilbeam

First a champion of Ramapithecus as hominin, then a principal author of the Sivapithecus facial revision.

Pongine

The orangutan clade; Sivapithecus is placed here, not with African apes and humans.