



Ramapithecus

Ramapithecus is the most important hominid from Miocene period. In recent years *Ramapithecus* has been accepted by many scholars as the first true hominid. There are at least two dozen fossils specimens that have been identified as belong to *Ramapithecus*. Most of these specimens consist of teeth and jaws and they principally come from two areas - the Siwalik Hills in India and Fort Ternan in Kenya.

Chronology & Environmental background:

A middle to late Miocene ape, known from fragmentary fossils from E. Africa, south-eastern Europe, and northern India and Pakistan, dating from 14–10 Ma ago. The Fort Ternan fossil have been absolutely dated to 14 million years ago, while the Siwalik hill specimens are younger being dated to about 10-12 million years ago.

Distribution:

The first discovery of *Ramapithecus* fossils was made by G.E. Lewis in 1932 in the Siwalik hills regions of India. He assigned one of the fossils, an upper jaw, to a new genus and species he named *Ramapithecus brevirostris*. The generic name simply means Rama's ape' Rama being the mythical prince who is the hero of Indian epic poem. The species name that Lewis chose was more meaningful for it is the Latin word for 'short snouted'. Next *Ramapithecus* fossil find was made by L.S.B. Leakey near Fort Ternan in south western Kenya in 1961. The specimen included parts of both sides of an upper jaw. Leakey gave it the name *Kenyapithecus wickeri* after his friend Fred Wicker, on whose farm the fossil was found. The next *Ramapithecus* specimen was excavated by Von Freyburg, a German geologist, in Greece during World War II. The specimen was assigned to another new genus and species: *Graicopithecus freyburgi*. Freyburg's find was the complete tooth bearing part of lower jaw and at the time of its discovery it contained all the teeth.

Next to the growing inventory of *Ramapithecus* fossil was a lower jaw unearthed from a Miocene deposit near Candir, some 40 miles north east of Ankara in Turkey in 1973. The specimen was named as *Sivapithecus alpani*. The species name of the Candir jaw honours the director of the Turkish Geological Survey. A major group of *Ramapithecus* like fossils has also been discovered in coal deposits of Miocene age in the Rudabanya Mountains of north eastern Hungary. They have been assigned to still another new genus and species *Rudapithecus hungaricus*. All these are the important geographical distribution of *Ramapithecus*.

Salient Anatomical Features:

1. Incisors and canine are inserted vertically and not in slight procumbent position as in apes.
2. Little or no canine diastema.
3. The canines of the *Ramapithecus* are not projected and they possess narrow faces. *Kenyapithecus* has a canine fossa.
4. The dental arcade is rounded.
5. The palate of the *Ramapithecus* is arched as in man.
6. Flattened and thick enamelled premolars and molars that appear to be adapted for heavy chewing and processing of hard food stuffs.



RAMSADAY COLLEGE

7. The molars possess the *Dryopithecus* Y-5 cusps pattern.
8. Slightly divergent tooth rows. The tooth rows have been identified as parabolic by some and V-shape by some others.
9. Reduction of size of third molar as compared to first and second molar.
10. The ratio between the sizes of front tooth (incisors and canine) and those of cheek teeth (premolars and molars) is roughly the same which indicates the human position.
11. Large inferior torus and shelf-like ridges are present inside the lower jaw of *Ramapithecus*.
12. Short maxilla that would indicate a placement of the chewing muscles that increase the chewing pressure brought to bear on the food being eaten.

Phylogeny:

Ramapithecus raised many important points which are highly effective in search of human ancestral pattern. On examining the nature and extent of teeth, some scholars described *Ramapithecus* as a weapon wielding terrestrial biped. *Ramapithecus*, according to the competent anthropologists, represents the oldest known ancestors of the human line.

The scientists like Simon, Pilbeam and Tattersall are the proponent of *Ramapithecus* as a human ancestor. The materials so far excavated in relation to *Ramapithecus* suggest a line between *Dryopithecus* group belonging to early Miocene and later real hominids. In a review-based study made by Conroy and Pilbeam a plausible interpretation of the *Ramapithecus* has been given as the late Cenozoic ancestor of *Australopithecus*.

In consequence of recent findings and interpretations *Ramapithecus* has been widely considered as a candidate for the first hominid. It splits up from the ape line 14 million years ago and marked the remarkable beginning of hominid line.

Ramapithecus certainly provides a possible link between the definitely ape like *Dryopithecus* and the later Pliocene and Pleistocene hominids. The molar teeth of the *Ramapithecus* are relatively much larger than those of *Homo*, but are smaller than those of *Dryopithecus*. The whole animal was gibbon size. *Ramapithecus* thus occurs in the proper time and place to represent a forerunner of the Pleistocene Hominidae.

The main reason for giving *Ramapithecus* a true hominid status is the similarity of its teeth with that of the later hominids. In discussing the status of *Ramapithecus*, Swartz and Jordan have remarked that when a creature is called hominid, it doesn't mean that it is a modern man, but this term is used for clearly human like forms. *Ramapithecus* was such a creature as understood by many authorities.