

Book Reivew

God-Apes and Fossil Men” Paleanthropology of South Asia. by Kenneth A.R. Kennedy, *The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor (2000)* (Hard Bound).

Kenneth A.R. Kennedy has produced an impressive work of scholarship which is a ready reckoner about the hominid journey of human-kind in South Asia and its borderlands. His theoretical approach to the documentation of the discoveries of man’s activities in this part of the world is by synchronizing the geological, palaeontological, archaeological, anthropological and ecological data that are sorely lacking in much of the current discourse on the subject of human evolution.

Kennedy’s breadth of vision and diversity of research disciplines encompasses a perspective of the human-ape connection, and has closed many gaps in our understanding of South Asian prehistory.

He opens his book by introducing the land, “The Land of Bharata”. This first chapter of the book outlines the present scenario and reconstruction of this landmass within a geological time scale. Chapter 2, “Establishing the Archaeological Record”, discusses in detail the development of archaeological findings and accumulation of artifacts from South Asia as well as a comparative account of tools and technology with European prehistory. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical aspects of palaeontology and evolution, along with the discoveries from South Asia, and the position of human fossil remains throughout the world. “The Aryan Hordes” of Chapter 4 cites the writings of Sir William Jones about Aryan religion and identity as well as the published ethnographies about the peoples of the subcontinent, as recorded by anthropologists. He has very nicely attempted to reconstruct the origin and lifeways of both Western and South Asian peoples. This chapter provides a unique feature of the palaeoanthropology as a scientific discipline, and the Aryan myth.

In the heart of the book the author has very well documented the rise, fall and current taxonomic-phylogenetic status of *Ramapithecus* (The God-Ape) in the context of Siwalik geology,

the fossil records of Miocene apes from other parts of Asia (as well as from Europe), and the way in which recent applications of molecular biology have served to support interpretations offered by palaeoanthropologists. These issues are discussed in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 charts the major environmental features of the South Asian Pleistocene. An account of the earliest-known stone tools and the interpretations of the Palaeolithic technologies in the context of European archaeological models are also given in this chapter. Chapter 7 opens with reviews of how South Asian Palaeolithic material has been classified by prehistorians. It discusses the technological features of the Soan tradition. It also contains summaries of archaeological discoveries in different geographical sectors of the subcontinent and its borderlands. Attention is directed to the historical development in research, variations in technological and cultural hunting-foraging lifeways across time and space, and the evidence of gradual, rather than abrupt, cultural transitions which are documented for some of the archaeological sites. Chapter 8 describes the fossil hominids of South Asia’s Pleistocene with a brief history of the finding of “Narmada man” and the *Homo erectus* / *Homo sapiens* issue. Also the findings of some of the earliest - known skeletons of modern *Homo sapiens* from the subcontinent are recorded in this chapter. Chapter 9 describes the palaeoenvironments of the Holocene epoch in South Asia as well as the cultural chronologies of human inhabitants adapting to post Pleistocene environments. “Mesolithic Hunter-Foragers” (Chapter 10) describes explorations at certain sites that led to a climacteric interpretation of Mesolithic lifeways. This chapter also gives the chronologies of the archaeological records as these emerged in different parts of the subcontinent. Chapter 11 describes the skeletal finds of the Mesolithic populations, their osteological sources and biological adaptations. With the emphasis upon the biological and environmental significance of the phenotypic traits, the author notes physical variations of body size, stature, muscular-skeletal robusticity, tooth size, markers on bone of pathology and stress of

habitual activities, and questions about biological affinities, population migrations and the interface of ecological settings and physical modifications over time. Chapter 12 discusses the theory of the origin of agriculture and the declining role of animal predation and food-gathering processes by the middle Holocene. Food-producing strategies and the profound differences between the two socioeconomic lifeways are discussed within the context of the broad archaeological and chronological records. Chapter 13 outlines traditional concepts about the early farmers and pastoral peoples of the subcontinent. Chapter 14, "The Harappan Civilization", contains a summary of the conclusions about Harappan biological identity. Chapter 15, "The Harappan Heritage", reviews the hypotheses accounting for the Harappan decline. It examines recent archaeological evidence which proposes that the post-Harappan cultures of central and peninsular India underwent gradual transformations marked by the end of urbanization and a writing system with the acquisition of Chalcolithic features. In the end, the evaluation of the theories which derive Chalcolithic South Asians from invading Aryans, or other foreign populations, is presented. Chapter 16 gives an account of discoveries of Iron Age sites in South Asia and details recent studies which reveal a great range of phenotypic diversity among the iron-using peoples of the subcontinent. In Chapter 17, the author discusses the interpretation of racial identities of prehistoric skeletal remains from South Asia and the model of the Three Race Theory. He remarks that lines

between the various disciplines are blurred, and to this consortium of disciplines are brought recent DNA analysis data from geneticists interested in resolving the "Aryan problem". On this subject, the South Asian skeletal record is silent. The final chapter gives a comprehensive overview of the topics covered in the book.

The book will serve as the backbone for further research on the subject of human evolution and the analysis of controversies relating to the prehistory of South Asia.

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On behalf of the members of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Human Ecology, we congratulate Professor Dr. Kenneth A.R. Kennedy (Founder Member of the Journal) for such an excellent and outstanding book on human evolution of South Asia, for which he has been awarded the William W. Howells Book Award by the American Anthropological Association at its 100th meeting in New Orleans in November 2002.

I wonder if it may be possible for the author and the publisher to make available a paperback edition of this book at some reasonable rate for the students, researchers, teachers of life and social sciences at the university level and for the general public of the India region.

Managing Editor