

The 'spread of our species'

8 November 2005

Modern humans arrival in South Asia may have led to demise of indigenous populations.

In a major new development in human evolutionary studies, researchers from the University of Cambridge argue that the dispersal of modern humans from Africa to South Asia may have occurred as recently as 70,000 years ago.

“Paleoanthropological projects must now be launched in South Asia if we hope to document the spread of our species and if we wish to explain how we became behaviorally modern,” writes Michael Petraglia, author of a forthcoming article in 'Current Anthropology'.

The expansion of modern humans into South Asia appears to be part of a complex—at times fatal—story. Once modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) arrived in regions like India, the researchers argue that they would have met indigenous archaic hominids (such as *Homo heidelbergensis*).

“While the precise explanations for the demise of the archaic populations is not yet obvious, it is abundantly clear that they were driven to extinction, likely owing to competition with modern humans over the long term,” Petraglia said.

However, Petraglia and his graduate student Hannah James were not able to find any sign of a sudden “revolution” in modern human behaviour 50,000 years ago, an idea advocated by some researchers working in Africa and Europe. Instead, James said: “The archaeological evidence from South Asia indicates a diversity of behavioral responses in which explicitly symbolic artifacts were sometimes, but not always, produced.”

Source: University of Cambridge

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