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TENSING RODRIGUES

Perhaps it is time now to recapitulate all that we have learned about the answer to the question: Who are we? We still do not have a definite answer; perhaps we shall never have. Not at least till we have genotyped the large variations in the people of Komkan. But through our long search for our roots, we have got some clues and have formulated a working hypothesis. However, there is nothing final about it; it is always open for debate. We can in no way claim to know the ultimate truth; all that we might have succeeded in is to place some markers along the way, which may be of use to those who seek to understand the Komkani mosaic. Our story may seem fabulous and untenable as it may not conform to the accepted narrative at many places; it is up to the future researchers to prove it wrong or improve upon it. We have proceeded on the premise that where hard evidence is difficult to come by, it makes sense to go by preponderance of probability, till further evidence proves it wrong.

Let us begin with what we may consider to be the starting point, based on the currently dominant 'version' of the spread of modern humans out of Africa somewhere around 60,000 to 40,000 BCE. These humans – technically called the Anatomically Modern Humans (AMH), and closest in semblance to us – are believed to have trudged northwards along the west coast of Africa into the Persian Gulf, and further along the coast to the Kutch peninsula, and then southwards along the west coast of India. [The Journey of Man, December 30, 2018]. We do not know for certain whether they circumnavigated round Kanyakumari or cut across the Indian peninsula short of it; but we have evidence of their passing along the east coast of India. Possibly they took the latter option, some of them remaining behind to populate the southern tip of the Indian peninsula. The current ethnographic map of the peninsula suggests the possibility that the early humans used the Palakkad corridor to cut through the peninsula. [The Vetuvan, The Irula And The Kurumbar, April 26, 2020]. If we step back a little, may be three hundred thousand years earlier, we find evidence of hominin inhabitation at Attirambakkam on the east coast. These are not modern humans. But the finds suggest that perhaps before the modern humans, this region hosted archaic humans. The population in this region therefore could be sharing the ancestries of the AMH who came in later as well as of the archaic humans. Based on the ethnographic map of the peninsula, there is a strong possibility that these could be the ancestors of the vetuvan or vedar found on the south eastern tip of the Indian peninsula and Sri Lanka, and possibly through them of the modern tamil.

As of now we do not have any evidence of these earliest settlers in Komkan, even in the extended or trans-Sahyadri Komkan that we have called the Brhatkomkan. They could have been pushed out by the subsequent waves of people. What did happen perhaps is a genetic mixture of the original vedar ancestry and the new/incoming ancestry. This second ancestry came from the ksatriya, who migrated from the Near East, could be Iranians from around the Zagros mountains. They entered the Indian subcontinent around 8,000 BCE and spread along the Indo-Gangetic plain; they are the ones who brought wheat and barley, and cattle and sheep into the subcontinent. They also seem to have brought rice from Indo-Gangetic plain into the Deccan. They seem to have reached Deccan about 3,000 BCE. Over time they seem to have mixed with the native population so well that the native Indian ethnicity was fully replaced by two new ethnicities – the kur (consisting today of kunbi and several similar communities) and the Deccan ksatriya (known as caddi among the Goan Christians and as Maratha among the Goan Hindus and as Maratha or Vokkaliga in the rest of Brhatkomkan). The two, however, carry about 80 per cent native Indian ancestry. Also the difference between the kur and the Deccan ksatriya is marginal. While the former carry the Iranian ancestry along the maternal side only, the latter carry it both along the maternal and the paternal side. [The Formation of Kumlbi and Deccan Ksatriya, April 5, 2020]

In the meantime, around 6,000 BCE another migration seems to have taken place from South East Asia and China, across the northeastern frontier near the India-China-Myanmar border. [Huanying Kirat, June 2, 2019]. We have called these people kirat. They brought in japonica rice from China, which crossed with the local indica rice in the Middle Gangetic plain; domesticated rice associated with Lahuradewa, in the eastern Uttar Pradesh, shares key domestication mutations with East Asian japonica rice. We do not know who the extant inhabitants of the Middle Gangetic plain were when the kirat reached there. They could be kur who inhabited the peninsula. But most certainly their encounter with kirat resulted in a new people carrying the genes of both. The communities (Munda, Khasi, Santhal, etc) that presently inhabit the eastern Gangetic and Bramhaputra plain, including its extension to the south, generally clubbed under the Austro-Asiatic group, do reveal the traces of both kur and kirat ancestry. The spread of the kirat ancestry among the kur people seemingly followed the expansion of rice farming in the Indian subcontinent. Different studies have put the kur-kirat encounter between 8,000 BCE and 3,000 BCE, which fits well with the beginnings of rice farming in the Middle Gangetic plain [Tatte et al, 2018 : The Genetic Legacy Of Continental Scale Admixture In Indian Austroasiatic Speakers, in bioRxiv; Zhang et al, 2015 : Y-Chromosome Diversity Suggests Southern Origin And Paleolithic Backwave Migration Of Austro-Asiatic Speakers From Eastern Asia To The Indian Subcontinent, in Scientific Reports]. We do not find much of kirat ancestry in Komkani population, except in one specific community.

And that community is the kathiyavadi ksatriya. At the root of it lay the historic encounter between the ksatriya and the kirat, or rather the kur-kirat; the former moving east through the Indo-Gangetic plain, and the latter moving west. Both the kirat and the ksatriya had interests beyond farming; at least some of them. They had interest in trade between China and the Near East. And the hub of this trade, was Kathiyavad. [The Shells Of Khirsara, June 13, 2019]



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