

Initial Migrations of Human Beings

Genealogy reminds us that we all came from Africa and were once black

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The story of human migration is very expansive and inexact. It has plenty of holes and lot of dots. It has cunning passages and contrived corridors. The world's greatest anthropologists, paleontologists, genealogists, archeologists and others involved in the science skip over the holes cautiously, connect the dots hesitantly, navigate the routes tentatively, and string together evidence, speculation, and theory to arrive at conclusions, some of which have stood the test of time.

You may believe the story of both human evolution and human migration, holes, warts, and all, is fairly logical, coherent, and broadly accepted. It is agreed on the basis of reasonable evidence that humankind took its first outbound steps from Africa to Asia. As they schlepped across Asia populating it, some sailed on towards Australia from Southeast Asia, while others doubled back north to Europe, populating that continent.

One or both of these groups populated northern and eastern Asia, including Russia, and some 15,000 years ago, stepped nimbly across the Bering Strait connecting Asia and America. Down they went along the west coast of America, the first place to be populated on the continent. It wasn't the conquistadors or the Pilgrim Fathers who came from the east across the Atlantic who discovered America. The land was discovered by itinerants who migrated from Africa to Asia to America, where they became Native Americans, and were later erroneously described by Columbus and co as Indians.

There are occasional challenges to this migration theory. Some experts have argued that America may also have been discovered and populated by seafaring Pacific islanders who came from the west, or ocean-faring Atlanticists predating the conquistadors by many centuries coming from the east. In either case, it would seem Native Americans are of Asian stock, and even before that, of African stock, because everything flowed out of Rift Valley. In that sense, we are all "black". Whether they came by boats or on foot through Bering Strait, the natives of America are of Asian or African origin, depending on how far back you want to go into the history of migration.

A recently analysed DNA sample from a 10,000-year-old skeleton discovered in Gough's Cave near Cheddar Gorge, England, offers a remarkable possibility: the first modern British people had "dark brown to black skin". This should not surprise anyone. Research presented at the American Association of Physical Anthropologists shows that the whiteness, or

paleness, of Europeans is only 8,000 years old. It turns out that Christ was a middle-easterner with a swarthy complexion and black hair. An artist's impression from anthropologist Richard Neave showed him looking rather like Saddam Hussein.

In a "genetic portrait of America" that he drew in his 2012 book *DNA USA*, Bryan Sykes came to many startling conclusions on the basis of evidence from current US population: Not only did European genes appear among Native Americans as early as 10,000 years ago, among white Americans too there is evidence of African DNA. America is genetic mosaic long predating the US boast of being a melting pot. The broader point is that America has been a melting pot melded from migration over centuries.

Of course, you can't expect white nationalists in the US and hypernationalists in India — which is also periodically in the throes of nativism — to absorb or process all this. They have little bandwidth for science, evolution, migration and other complex issues. For their leaders, it is easier to toss out red meat to nativist crowds and rile them up about immigrants and foreigners, rather than let them know that they too have DNA from the "shithole" continent.

Long before nativists in India settled on the country being Indic or Sanskritic or Brahminic or whatever term they prefer to "otherwise" rest of the population who choose to look beyond 5,000 years, it turns out that the subcontinent was open to two possible migration movements from Africa: One that set off some 60,000 years ago across the Horn of Africa and moving east across the Arabian Peninsula; another that crossed into Asia further north at Red Sea some 50,000 years ago and went across the Caucasus before looping south into India.

Along the way both groups possibly mingled with Neanderthals and other hominid derivatives / species who may have migrated earlier, before the two streams met in the heart of India over scores of generations.

So in the one sense, except for the original inhabitants' descendants of the Rift Valley who may remain there, everyone on this planet, unconstrained by narrow nationalism, is an immigrant descendant of one kind or the other. Our ancestors saw this, which is why, in recognition of our mongrel status, they embraced the concept of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* — the world is one. This might hurt your feelings, but your holy cross or holy thread or holy book is not going to keep you pure, because you never were and you were never meant to be.