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# Concept of Isolation, Isolating mechanisms & their role in evolution

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## Introduction :-

Mechanisms that prevent successful reproduction between members of two or more populations i.e. closely related species, that have descended from the same original population are called Isolating mechanisms. This is also an important pre-requisite of speciation. The role of Isolating mechanisms in speciation was first of all recognised by the post-Darwinian evolutionist, Sobzhaneky, in 1937.

Types of Isolation or Isolating mechanisms - Mayr (1970) and Stebbins (1971), have classified the reproductive Isolating mechanisms into two classes namely pre-mating or pre-zygotic Isolating mechanisms and post-mating or post-zygotic isolating mechanisms.

I Pre-mating or pre-zygotic Isolating mechanisms - It prevents wastage of gametes and so are highly susceptible to improvement by natural selection. It prevents interspecific crosses like fertilization and zygote formation. It is again of two types -

1. Habitat Isolation: In such kind of isolation, populations live in the same region, but occupy different habitats, so that potential mates do not meet.

2. Seasonal or Temporal Isolation - The populations exist in the same region, but are sexually mature at different times, so that, potential mates remain unable to mate.

3. Ethological Isolation - These populations are isolated by different and incompatible behaviours before mating, so that only potential meet occurs.

4. Mechanical Isolation - Cross fertilization or pollination is prevented or restricted by differences in structure of reproductive organs, so that, copulation is attempted but no transfer of sperms take place.

II Post-mating Isolating mechanisms - Fertilization takes place and hybrid zygotes are formed, but these are inviable, or give rise to weak or sterile hybrids.

1. Gametic mortality - sperm transfer takes place but egg is not fertilized.

2. Zygotic mortality - Egg is fertilized but zygote dies.  
3. Hybrid Inviability

F<sub>1</sub> hybrid of reduced viability.

4. Developmental hybrid sterility - Hybrids are sterile because of abnormal segregation to the gametes of whole chromosomes or combinations of genes.

5. Segregational hybrid sterility - Here also hybrids are sterile as gametes develop abnormally or meiosis breaks down before it is completed.

6. F<sub>2</sub> breakdowns - F<sub>1</sub> hybrids are normal, vigorous and fertile, but F<sub>2</sub> contains many weak or sterile individuals.

It is further recognized that for these reproductive isolating mechanism to evolve, the separated populations of an original single group must be separated spatially or geographically or by time. Hence, three types of Isolations has been reported -

A Isolations by time :- The palaeontological history of animals and plants suggest that the populations at one time is always the descendant of the one living earlier. In case of straight evolution one species simply gets transformed gradually into a new species through accumulating genetic differences. If the

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changes are great enough than a new species evolves. e.g. evolution of Horse. According to G.G. Simpson horse evolved some 16 million years ago in Tertiary. It underwent successive changes produced by thousands of favourable mutations of every gene involved is the evolutionary trend of each characteristic.

2. Isolation by Distance - Sheer distance also acts as an isolating factor for a species which occupies a great range of area, which is unbroken by effective barriers. e.g. Wrens (birds) of South America. Wrens are found all over the continent but the wrens of one region differ from those of the other in colour changes, size, proportions and habits. Thus, only sheer distance can produce local races (subspecies).

3. Geographical Isolation - It is most common type of Isolation and occurs when an original population is divided into two or more groups by geographical barriers such as a river, desert, glacier, mountains or oceans, all of which prevent interbreeding between them. In the course of time, different mutations become incorporated in the gene

pools of the different groups. These differences are of such a great nature that they do not interbreed, thus species have been formed by geographical Isolation. ~~The~~ e.g. Darwin's finches. Darwin found that there were 26 groups of finches among the Galapagos Islands. Only five of these groups are same as the finches found on the mainland. The other twenty-one were types peculiar to the groups of islands. Some of twenty one groups interbred quite freely, while other did not. Apparently, each of these groups became isolated by migration. Another example is provided by elephant seals. The Southern elephant seal, *Misouza lionine*, occurs in the cool waters of the Southern hemisphere around Antarctica, coasts of South America, South Africa. A close ally, the northern elephant seal, *Misouza angustirostris*, is found in cool waters along the coast of western North America. However, the breeding populations of the two forms are separated by 3000 miles. Thus, these forms occupy discrete geographic or ecologic ranges separated by spatial barriers, are called Allopatric populations. And such kind of Isolation is Allopatric Isolation and such species are called Allopatric Species.  
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