

Isolating mechanisms and their role in evolution

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, Sobzhanovsky, 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 prezygotic Isolating mechanisms and post-mating or postzygotic isolating mechanisms.

I Pre-mating or prezygotic 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 four types -

1. Habitat Isolation: In such kind of isolation, same regions, but occupy different habitats, so that potential mates don't meet.

2. Seasonal or Temporal Isolation - The populations exist in the same regions, 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 behaviors 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 - Zygote produces an

F₁ 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 // F₂ breakdowns - F₁ hybrids are normal, vigorous and fertile, but F₂ 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, these types of Isolations has been reported -

A // Isolations by time :- The palaeontological history of animals and plants suggest that the population 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 that a new species evolves. e.g. evolution of Horse. According to G.S. Simpson horse evolved some 16 million years ago in Eocene. It underwent successive changes produced by thousands of favourable mutations of every gene involved in 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, proportion 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, mountain or ocean, all of which prevent interbreeding between them, thus in the course of time, different mutations become incorporated in the gene

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parts 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. For 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 others did not. Apparently, each of these groups became isolated by migration. Another example is provided by elephant seal. The Southern elephant seal, *Mirounga lionina*, occurs in the cool waters of the Southern hemisphere around Antarctica, coasts of South America, South Africa. A close ally, the northern elephant seal, *Mirounga 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 these species are called Allopatric species.
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