

Hindu Paradigm of Evolution

Author – Anil Chawla

Creation of the universe by God is supposed to be the foundation of all Abrahmic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). As per the theory of Creation, God and universe are two separate and distinct entities – God is the creator and universe is the created. The duality of God and the universe is unquestionable in Abrahmic religions and doubting it in any way can be considered blasphemy. Any claim about any individual human being representing God or claiming any proximity with God is also considered blasphemy and may invite serious punishment.

In contrast to the theory of Creation accepted by Abrahmic religions, the theory of evolution by means of natural selection rejects the notion that the universe was created on a fixed date by some entity. Evolution is a cornerstone of modern science, accepted as one of the most reliably established of all facts and theories of science, based on evidence not just from biological sciences, but also from anthropology, psychology, astrophysics, chemistry, geology, physics, mathematics, and other scientific disciplines, as well as behavioral and social sciences. Understanding of evolution has made significant contributions to humanity, including preventing and treating human disease, new agricultural products, industrial innovations, computer science and rapid advances in life sciences.

Evolution by means of natural selection is the process by which traits that enhance survival and reproduction become more common in successive generations of a population. It has often been called a "self-evident" mechanism because it necessarily follows from three simple facts:

- Variation exists within populations of organisms with respect to morphology, physiology, and behaviour (phenotypic variation).
- Different traits confer different rates of survival and reproduction (differential fitness).
- These traits can be passed from generation to generation (heritability of fitness).

(Write-up on evolution from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution>)

Hindu Paradigm of Evolution

Evolution and creation are seen as central to the debate between science and religion in the Western world where religion means only Abrahmic religions. It is not my intention to join the debate by trying to prove or disprove one of the theories. The purpose of this article is to look at the issues from a Hindu perspective.

The first, foremost and fundamental belief of Hindus is in the concept of the cosmos or *Brahm*. Cosmos has no beginning or end either in time or in space. In other words, cosmos never began and will never end. There are no boundaries of cosmos. It is truly infinite in all possible ways. The solar system, stars, planets and all forms of life that exist either on earth or anywhere else are part of the cosmos. Surely, you and I (along with all our relatives, friends and neighbors) are also part of the cosmos and contribute to making of the cosmos as much as every distant star does. The cosmos is always changing. It is most appropriate to say that the only thing constant about cosmos is change. Hindus tend to treat the totality of the cosmos as an entity by itself which manifests itself through each of its infinite parts.

Often people who do not understand the concept of Brahm or cosmos tend to equate Brahm or cosmos with the Abrahmic concept of God. Even some prominent Hindus like Gandhi have sung hymns which say that Ram, God and Allah are different names for the same entity. This is absolutely wrong. God, in Abrahmic thought, is the creator and by virtue of being the creator has the right to lay down the laws by which universe is to be regulated. In Hindu thought, there is no differentiation between the creator and creation. Each one of us or for that matter every particle / thing / being is as much a part of the creator as of the creation. In Hindu thought, the creator and the creation merge into one infinite being called the Brahm. When a Hindu says, I am the Brahm (*aham brahmasmi*), this is not an egoistic statement but a narration of fact underlining the fact that everyone and everything is the cosmos. Ram and Krishn are not Gods (the way Abrahmic religions consider God to be) for Hindus but human manifestations of the Cosmic Being.

Brahm or cosmos is an integrated whole where each constituent is in relationship with other constituents. No constituent stands independent of other constituents. For example, let us consider a living being say a human being or a cat or dog. Each living being is in constant interaction with millions of other beings and inanimate things. A simple life function like digestion will not take place if the microorganisms in the stomach and intestines do not their job properly. Often we are unable to see the relationships that one species has to other species including different forms of

Hindu Paradigm of Evolution

microorganisms. But, just because we cannot see or understand the relationships, it cannot be said that the relationships do not exist.

Hindu thought, with its emphasis on cosmos and the relationship with different constituents of cosmos, makes a constant effort to understand the cosmic reality and the relationships that are the foundation of cosmos.

With the above brief background on Hindu cosmic view, let us return to the Abrahmic concept of creation. Obviously, the Abrahmic duality of God and the universe or of creator and created cannot be accepted by Hindu thought. Hindus reject the notion of creation at one fixed point in time because it goes against their fundamental beliefs of infinity and ever-changing nature of the cosmos.

Having rejected the theory of creation, let us turn to the theory of evolution. Hinduism accepts the concept of constant change and hence, Hindus have a common ground with the theory of evolution. However, from a Hindu perspective, the theory of evolution lacks on some critical aspects.

Some observations about the theory of evolution by natural selection are as follows:

- (a) Theory of Evolution by natural selection assumes that each species evolves in some fashion or direction either randomly or by some process of self-decision. What makes a species go in some particular direction is not discussed. Surely, there are some situations when species fail to evolve to match up to the changing environment and perish. In the past two centuries many species have become extinct. The big question that remains unanswered is that why did these extinct species not choose an evolutionary path that would have prevented their extinction.
- (b) While academic papers and books on evolution do not mention about the process of self-decision by a species to take an evolutionary path, the popular translation of the theory of evolution often leads to an understanding that a species can choose to develop some features to adapt better to the environment. One has to only see Discovery or National geographic channel to hear the commentator tell how such-and-such species have developed some traits or characteristics to face up to the challenges posed by the environment. How can a species take such decisions? Probably, we as humans need to learn these skills that many species seem to be blessed with as told to us by the evolutionists and their followers in popular media. Can we

Hindu Paradigm of Evolution

as humans evolve to develop skins that can survive through polar winters or Saharan summers? In other words, is it possible to have evolution by conscious decision? If yes, the solution to many problems faced by human beings will be better evolution and not better machines.

- (c) Theory of evolution by natural selection tends to look at each species as an independent entity with no relation to other species. It cannot be denied that in nature there are multiple balances. There is a fine balance of capabilities between the predator and the hunted. A forest has only a handful of lions or tigers while it has hundreds of deer even though a tiger seems all powerful against a deer. The relative numbers of tigers and deer in a forest is not determined by any government decree but by some relationship that exists between the two species. It is not possible for the tigers to evolve in a manner that their numbers start equaling the number of deer in a forest. Clearly, the theory of evolution by natural selection has to take into account not just one species but all the species.
- (d) The “self-evident” natural selection seems to be evident only in hind sight and not for moving ahead. Scientists can explain fairly well the changes that different species have undergone over the past few centuries but fail to predict the evolutionary path that any species is likely to take in the years or centuries to come.

The above observations illustrate the limitations of the theory of evolution by natural selection. Pointing out limitations does not mean outright rejection of the theory. Hindu thought relates to the notion of constant change espoused by the theory, but sees the need for some tinkering to bring it closer to reality.

From the perspective of Hindu cosmic paradigm, Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection needs to be modified to Theory of Evolution by Cosmic Will or Design. While the Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection emphasizes individual will or decision-making, the Theory of Evolution by Cosmic Will or Design is based on the premise that the whole shapes up the parts. Each individual or class of individuals or species is dependent on and controlled by the environment or eco-system or the cosmos. The cosmos may also be called as nature or environment or eco-system. In essence, the holistic reality has been considered by Hindu thought as a Being capable of planning, taking decisions and implementing them within the general laws that are characteristic of the way cosmos operates. Scientists tend to observe this

Hindu Paradigm of Evolution

Cosmic Being in terms of what they call as natural laws even though, officially speaking, science seems to deny the existence of a cosmic entity.

When we look at the whole world as part of and as controlled by a Cosmic Being, each species and each individual is a part of the grand scheme of the Cosmic Being. The three essentials of Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection - phenotypic variation, differential fitness and heritability of fitness (discussed earlier) are not denied by Hindu thought, but are only accepted with a rider that the control and manipulation of all three as regards any species rests with the Cosmic Being.

The integration of holistic cosmic thought with the theory of evolution is important not just for biology but also for all branches of humanities and social sciences. Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection has been used to justify models of individualistic growth whether of an individual or of a community. The models conveniently ignore that any growth that is not in line with the cosmic or natural scheme is generally speaking cancerous. Theory of Evolution by Cosmic Design lays stress on understanding of the holistic reality and one's role in the holistic scheme before talking of one's growth.

Differential fitness, which is central to the theory of evolution, also undergoes a change when we shift from natural selection to cosmic design. The concept of fitness cannot be defined in isolation of the cosmic schema. Let me explain this with an example. The popular impression is that ants, as a species, are weaker or less fit than lions. The reality is that ants are better at survival and reproduction as compared to lions. From the perspective of a Hindu, there can be no comparison between the lions and the ants. Both serve different roles on planet earth. It is the cosmic scheme that a forest has only a few lions while it has billions of ants. It is also part of the cosmic scheme that lions indulge in killing members of their species. Neither the ants nor the lions should try to emulate the other in terms of either survival or reproduction. Once we look from this perspective, we cannot be trying to create a scale of differential fitness to compare different species or different communities or individuals.

The focus on cosmic design as against natural selection leads to a major change in attitude. Neither Darwin nor any of the evolutionary biologists that have followed him ever talked of theory of evolution being the basis of a theory of morality. However, evolution by natural selection has been used to build a morality that is based on big-fish-eat-small-fish. It may be worthwhile to mention here the is-ought problem.

Hindu Paradigm of Evolution

Scientists specialize in describing what is. Philosophers and thinkers use their description of “what is” to build theories of what ought to be. Natural selection and differential fitness has been used as an argument against kindness, cooperation, altruism etc.

The is-ought problem does not exist in case of the paradigm of evolution by cosmic design. In the paradigm, the focus is on living life in a holistic manner as per the cosmic scheme and not on building fitness or strengths (whatever that means). The idea that some individuals can break out of the general breed of human beings and emerge as some sort of super-humans is scoffed at by Hindu thought. Each individual man or woman has to work to achieve excellence in the role that he / she is supposed to be playing in the world; and this itself is supposed to be the ultimate value or good. As individuals play out their respective roles, the society as a whole improves.

Moving from the almost universally accepted theory of evolution by natural selection to theory of evolution by cosmic design / plan is a revolutionary change since it involves a change in the paradigm of thought that has been dominant across the world for more than a century. The revolution in thought will surely take a long time to come.

Before I conclude, I request all thinking human beings to not reject the new thought merely because it carries the label of a religion (Hinduism). Let every thinking person examine the paradigm with his / her sharp intellect. Hinduism is not a religion founded by one individual. Hinduism is the truly scientific religion of the modern world. Hinduism respects knowledge. Hinduism respects all attempts at studying nature. You may differ with me and I shall respect you for that; but, please let your differences with me be based on your observations and understandings, and not on the religious label that you were born with.

Anil Chawla

9 August 2015

Copyright – All Rights Free

ANIL CHAWLA is an engineer and a lawyer by qualification but a philosopher by vocation and an advocate & strategic consultant by profession. His works can be seen at www.samarthbharat.com