**Richard Dawkins and Evolution**

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In 1859, a British man, Charles Darwin published a book called “On the Origin of Species.” This book was based on his study of creatures he had encountered during his travels to many overseas locations, including the Galapagos Islands. He put forward the theory that all living creatures that exist today, including human beings, have evolved for perhaps millions of years, from more primitive life forms to how they are today by a process of natural selection. Another name for this random development of species is blind evolution.

Darwin was a natural science graduate of Cambridge University and a geologist. He was also a Christian. Darwin did not intend to challenge religious beliefs with his book but many religious believers responded to it with fury, because his theory of evolution by natural selection was at odds with how religion explains the process of creation.

Darwin’s Theory of Evolution was published in 1859, which later became known to the world at large. Few theories have impacted the human mind as much as did Darwin’s theory. It had created a class of his disciples, the most prominent of which was Richard Dawkins.

Born in 1941, Richard Dawkins is a British evolutionary biologist and author. “The Selfish Gene,” published by him in 1976, established Professor Richard Dawkins as a leading figure in evolutionary theory and popularized the idea that replicating genes are the central force behind evolution, not individual organisms or species. His other landmark books include “The God Delusion,” “The Greatest Show on Earth,” and “The Blind Watchmaker “in which he repeated the same theorem.

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The common criticism was that Dawkins was too strong in his criticism of religion, and was thus rightly dubbed as “fundamental atheist.”

For anyone who would spend some time on this topic, two questions have always seemed quite a puzzle. Whence he came from at the time of his birth, and where he will go after his death. Every community and class of people have different views. When a community or creed takes a combined view, they form into one religious group. Their religious bonds keep them united in most of the activities. They believe that their births and deaths are ordained by God, who is the creator of this universe, and in this belief, they have firm faith.

Some critics hold that Richard Dawkins has educated and inspired many millions of people around the world, spanning generations, cultures, languages, and beliefs. His life’s work has been to open our minds to the beauty of science and to cast a fresh look on our closely held beliefs. He has been instrumental in demolishing the taboo around atheism, helping to bring non-believers into the mainstream of public discourse.

In the research done on this theory of evolution so far, three limitations of Darwin’s theory embrace the idea that all forms of life, great and small, were derived from a common primordial cell or organism which requires a scientific basis. The various religions, current and extinct, typically elevate humans above other forms of life.

The three limitations of Darwin’s theory concern the origin of DNA, the irreducible complexity of the cell, and the paucity of transitional species. Because of these limitations, the author predicts a paradigm shift away from evolution to an alternative explanation.

The objections to Darwinism are as follows:

(1) Darwin could not explain the origin and cause of variations that are generated during evolution.

(2) He emphasized the importance of the fittest organisms. Later, it has been suggested fit and fitter forms can also co-exist.

(3) The principle of inheritance was not present during Darwin.

By and large, there is no fundamental change in Darwin’s Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection. Nor can this Theory be termed as a threat to our traditional religions, despite the fact that the theory was propounded in 1859 i.e about 163 years earlier. It has however won many supporters and now stands at a much sounder footing than before. The people are complacent because there is no immediate danger from the impact of this Theory, and the organic change due to natural selection is taking place so slowly. Even after millions and billions of years, it would not cause a physical shock to humanity, although with time, it may mould their minds to move away from conventional religions. Over time, things will seem to be normal.

Paradoxically even the intelligentsia, the well-to-do, the common citizens, and the poor all have simply overlooked its inherent impact, as it is not going to affect their beliefs or ideas in any forcible future, nor is going to benefit any particular religion over the other. Everyone, except a few people, who have been aware of its implications for far too long.

*The writer is a former member of the Provincial Civil Service, and an author of Moments in Silence.*