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B.Sc HONS Part-III Paper -VII

Topic: Describe the phenomenon of colouration and Mimicry.

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Q. • Describe the phenomenon of colouration and mimicry.

Ans. According to Fisher (1936) "evolution is progressive adaptation and consists of nothing else." Adaptation is omnipresent. Successful and continuous existence of any species demands good adaptations. Colouration and mimicry are two aspects of adaptation and hence evolution.

1. Colouration

Colouration is a biological phenomenon where the animals develop different colours and colour patterns for protection, warning, frightening the enemies capturing prey. Recognizing mates and so on.

Nature of colour : The colour effects in animals and plants is caused by two factors, namely physical and chemical factors. The physical factors are refraction and diffraction. Chemical factors causing colouration are pigments. The pigments include melanin. Carotin, pterin etc.

Type of colouration : On the basis of the purpose of colouration, it is divided into the following types—

1. Protective colouration : In this type the animals develop colour patterns to conceal themselves from the predators. It is also called concealing colouration.

Examples : A small spider when frightened, rolls on itself to expose its abdomen and in this attitude, it looks like the empty head capsule of an ant. As the spider lives near the ant's nest where such capsules are common, this device is very effective.

2. Aggressive colouration : Here the animals develop colour pattern to threaten or frighten other animals. The eyed Hawk moth, *Smerinthus ocellatus* uses the eye-spots to threaten the predators.

3. Warning colouration : Certain animals are provided with certain unpleasant or dangerous attributes like unpleasant taste, unpalatability, poison, abnoxious odour, sting and so on. These animals are conspicuously coloured and they advertise their unpleasant or dangerous attributes to the predators.

The viceroy butterfly is edible and resembles in colour pattern the monarch butterfly.

2. Mimicry

Mimicry is defined as the resemblance of one organism to another or to any natural object for the purpose of concealment, protection or for some other advantage.

Mimicry is classified into following types :

(1) Protective mimicry : When mimicry offers protection to the mimic, the mimicry is called protective mimicry.

The stick insect or walking stick mimics exactly the twigs.

(2) Warning mimicry : There are some harmless or palatable animals which mimic the harmful or non-palatable animals. By this the mimics warn the enemies and protect themselves.

The non-poisonous *Ptyas* mimics the poisonous cobra by producing a hissing sound.

(3) Aggressive mimicry : In this type the mimics possess some lure to attract the prey. For example, it is predator resembles its prey, that predator may be able to approach its victim more easily than it could otherwise do.

(4) Mullerian mimicry : It is based on the observations made by Muller (1879). In this type two or more species with an unpleasant or dangerous attitude resemble each other for the purpose of protection.