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17. Is the theory of evolution of species inconsistent with the viewpoint of the Noble Qur'an with regards to the creation of Prophet Adam (a.s.)?

Interestingly the supporters of the theory of Evolution of Species, as well as those from amongst the Muslims who oppose it, have sought to adhere to the Qur'an to prove their stances. However, probably being influenced by their own beliefs, some have sought to base their arguments on verses which do not have a complete bearing on their views. Accordingly, we shall select, from both the sides, only those verses which can be placed under discussion with regards to the issue under consideration.

The most important verse upon which the supporters of evolution lay great stress is verse 33 of Surat Ale 'Imran:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ آدَمَ وَنُوحًا وَآلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَآلَ عِمْرَانَ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ

“Surely Allah chose Adam and Nuh and the descendants of Ibrahim and the descendants of 'Imran above the nations.”

They reason that since Nuh (a.s.) and the descendants of Ibrahim (a.s.) and the descendants of 'Imran (a.s.) lived in their ummah and were chosen from amongst them, therefore the case of Adam (a.s.) too ought to be similar. That is, during his period, humans – who have been referred to as the nations – must have necessarily existed and Adam (a.s.) had been chosen by Allah (s.w.t.) from amongst them. And this reveals that Adam (a.s.) was not the first human on the earth but rather, there had been

humans before him; the distinction of Adam (a.s.) over the other humans was his superior intellect and spirituality, and this was the factor that resulted in his selection from amongst the individuals, similar to him.

These supporters have also mentioned numerous other verses, some of which have no relation whatsoever with the issue of evolution such that interpreting them to mean this would be interpreting the Qur'an by personal opinion, while other verses are such that they can be considered to be consistent with the theory of evolution as well as with the independent creation of Adam (a.s.). Hence, we have decided against mentioning them here.

As for the objection against this argument, it can be stated that if the term العالمين (nations) in the verse is in the meaning of 'contemporary people' and اصطفاء (to choose) means that the selection must have necessarily taken place from similar individuals, then this argument could be accepted. However if one were to say that العالمين includes individuals, who are contemporary and those who are not, just as has been reported in the well-known tradition of the Noble Prophet (S), in connection with the excellence of Hadhrat Fatimah (s.a.), wherein he says:

أَمَّا ابْنَتِي فَاطِمَةُ فَإِنَّهَا سَيِّدَةُ نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ مِنَ الْأَوَّلِينَ وَالْآخِرِينَ.

“As for my daughter Fatimah, she is the chief of the ladies of the world, from the first to the last.”

Then, in such a case, their argument on the basis of the above verse would be inappropriate. This is because it would be exactly as if one says: Allah (s.w.t.) had chosen a group of people from amongst the humans (humans of all eras and epochs), one of whom is Adam (a.s.). In such a case, there is no need for humans to have existed during the time of Adam (a.s.) such that the term العالمين becomes applicable to them or that Adam (a.s.) is chosen from amongst them. This is especially so when the choosing was being done by Allah (s.w.t.), Who had been fully cognizant of the future and of all the generations that were to come. 1

However, more importantly, the verses which the proponents of 'constancy of species' have selected as proof from the Qur'an are those that say:

Allah (s.w.t.) has created man from dry clay, which had been taken from dark-coloured and stinking mud. Interestingly, this expression has been utilized in connection with the creation of 'insan'...

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ صَلْصَالٍ مِنْ حَمَإٍ مَسْنُونٍ

“And certainly We created man of clay that gives forth sound, of black mud fashioned in shape.”2

as well as for 'bashar'...

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِّنْ صَلْصَالٍ مِّنْ حَمَإٍ مَّسْنُونٍ

“And when your Lord said to the angels: Surely I am going to create a mortal of the essence of black mud fashioned in shape.”³

And later, also for Adam (a.s.) – this being inferred contextually from the mention of the prostration of the angels (Note the verses 29, 30 and 31 of Suratul Hijr.)

At first glance, the apparent meaning of the verse appears to be that initially Adam (a.s.) was created out of black mud and then, when his form was completed, the divine soul was blown into it subsequent to which the angels fell down in prostration before him, except Iblis.

The style of speech indicates that between the creation of Adam (a.s.) from mud and the emergence of the present form no other species existed.

The term 'ثم', appearing in some of the verses and used in the 'Arabic language to denote 'a sequence with intervening time intervals', can never be taken as evidence to claim the passage of millions of years and the existence of thousands of species; rather, it could quite possibly allude to the intervals that existed between the various stages of Adam's (a.s.) creation – from mud and then from dry clay and then the blowing of the divine soul.

And it is for this reason that this very term 'ثم' has been employed in connection with the creation of man in the embryonic world and the stages of his development within it. The Noble Qur'an says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّنَ الْبَعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِّنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِّنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّنْ مُّضْغَةٍ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ لِّنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ وَنُقِرُّ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ

“O' people! if you are in doubt about the raising, then surely We created you from dust, then from a small seed, then from a clot, then from a lump of flesh, complete in make and incomplete, that We may make clear to you; and We cause what We please to stay in the wombs until an appointed time, then We bring you forth as babies, then that you may attain your maturity.”⁴

You observe that there is no necessity for 'ثم' to indicate upon a lengthy interval; rather, just as it is employed for protracted intervals, it can also be utilized for short intervals too.

From what we have mentioned above, we infer that although the verses of the Qur'an do not directly mention the issue of evolution or 'constancy of species', nevertheless, the apparent meanings of the verses is more in accordance with the concept of independent creation (of course, this is as far as the creation of man is concerned).

Despite not being entirely explicit, the apparent meanings of the verses dealing with the creation of Adam (a.s.) mostly tend to revolve around the concept of independent creation; but with regards to the other living beings, the Noble Qur'an remains silent.⁵

1. Another possibility is that within a short time, the children of Adam (a.s.) constituted a small society and Adam (a.s.) was the chosen one from amongst them.

2. Suratul Hijr (15), Verse 26

3. Suratul Hijr (15), Verse 28

4. Suratul Hajj (22), Verse 5

5. Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 11, pg. 86

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