

U.N.
SEP. VI
MSC-12

BIOLOGICAL - CLOCK

As a clock is responsible for informing the time of the day and night, a thermometer is responsible for informing the rise and fall of temperature and a barometer is responsible for informing the changes in pressure of the environment, similarly there is an equipment within the body of animals and plants which are existing in this gigantic living universe. This equipment is responsible for setting and active conditions of animals or plants working in response to the environmental factors. This equipment or device is termed as "BIOLOGICAL - CLOCK". This term was first coined by a German plant physiologist named "ERWING BUNNING" in 1929.

This clock regulates the active and resting conditions of animals in response to the external factors. These active or resting conditions in response to external environmental factors are known as rhythms and these rhythms are kept regular or entrained by environmental cues known as Zeitgebers.

For example, regular rising and setting of the sun. If the natural zeitgeber is blocked from the animals then a substitute takes place in the working of the animal to synchronize gradually with the new environment.

The regulatory factors or the basic manifestation of a biological clock may be divided into four groups -

1. CIRCADIAN RHYTHM — These rhythms are related with the rise and setting of the sun. It is a cyclic variation in the intensity of metabolic and physiological processes of a day. It is a cyclic variation of some facet of behaviour of about 24 hours.

In other words, in this natural habitat, animals or plants remain in the rest or active during the day hours or photoperiod is called as circadian rhythm. It is generated by the rotation of the earth on its axis.

It may be divided into sub-groups -

- (a) DIURNAL RHYTHM — It is a rhythm

(b) NOCTURNAL RHYTHM — It is a rhythm of biological variations occurring between sunset and sunrise.

There are many examples of circadian rhythm. The most commonly well studied circadian rhythm was given by Aschoff and Weaver in 1966 is "SLEEP" which remains undisturbed even if a human being is kept isolated from all environmental influences.

Babies show a four hour awaking rhythm apparently every four to five hours for feeding. So, initially a circadian rhythm of 25 hours develops which gradually becomes synchronized to a 24 hour rhythm with maturation of sense organs. This shows that circadian rhythm is actually of 24 hours and innate.

Daily activity patterns may be changed by hibernation and may change at different seasons of the year. For example, in nocturnal animals such as bats and deer which become active at sunset. Total activity time of these

type of animals tends to be longer in winter season than that of summer season, because the duration of winter nights become more than that of summer nights. In diurnal animals, on the other hand, it tends to be shorter in winter.

2. TIDAL RHYTHM — These rhythms are related with tides and these occur twice a day with the reflex of tide and flowing movement of sea.

For example, in Mussels (i.e., Mytilus edulis and Mytilus californicus), rhythmic fluctuations in the rate of water populations relating to the tide was observed by K.S. Rao in 1954.

3. LUNAR RHYTHM — The correlation of animals with moon is known as lunar rhythm or lunar periodicity. This type of rhythm are mostly present in marine animals. The activity of the animals which shows this type of rhythm is the highest at the full moon and the lowest at the quarter moon.

Grunion fish is the most common example which shows the lunar rhythm. It is affected by the tides. At the time of full moon when the tide becomes high and these fishes come on the sea shore with the tide and breeding takes place. The higher tide penetrates the eggs in sand. They do not hatch up to two weeks. After two weeks, when the highest tide comes, the small fries come from the eggs and enter the sea.

So, we can say that the lunar rhythms are associated with 14th/28th day cycle of the moon. In other words, from our point of view, it is the menstrual cycle of women having a periodicity of 28 days. But in some other animals, this corresponds to a cycle of about 29.5 days. The most common example is the Paleo woman (i.e., Eunice) in which reproductive activity occurs during the neap or low tides of last quarter moon in October and November. The fresh water guppy (i.e., Poecilia reticulata) has

a rhythm of changes of spectral sensitivity which corresponds to the lunar cycle.

4. CIRCANNUAL OR SEASONAL RHYTHM —

These rhythms have a period of about one year under constant laboratory conditions such as sufficient light, temperature, heat etc. when all exogenous influences are shut out. It has been established in birds. In them, migration takes place in a season and after that season these come to their own places. Again in that season after one year, migration takes place. So, a cycle of one year or seasonal periodicity is maintained. The other example is the hibernation of frog of periodicity of about one year. In mammals, for example Western European hedge-hog (i.e. Euro-naceous europeans) and also in man there are marked physiological changes which are correlated with the season.

Other examples, such as Garden Warbler and Willow Warbler are long distance migrants which