



STEPHEN J. GOULD



(Sept. 10, 1941 - May 20, 2002)

It is with deep sorrow that the Palaeontological Society of India records the sad passing away of Prof. Stephen Jay Gould this year. He had been suffering from cancer and finally succumbed to it on May 20, 2002 after a prolonged battle against it. The deadly disease snatched him away from our midst at the age of sixty-one. Dr. Gould was professor at Harvard University and curator of Museum of Comparative Zoology.

Born on September 10, 1941 in New York City, he attended Antioch College and received an A. B. in 1963. Afterwards, he did graduate work in Evolutionary Biology and Palaeontology from Columbia University and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1967. He joined Harvard University as Assistant Professor in 1967 and became an Associate Professor in 1971 and a Professor in 1973. His doctoral work was concerned with variation and evolution of Bermudian land snail *Poecilozonites*, a study which was to become a starting point in a later theory of microevolution. His fascination for Palaeontology was deep-rooted and was germinated at the age of five when he first had a close look of the towering *Tyrannosaurus* skeleton at the American Museum of Natural History.

Gould developed the Punctuated Equilibrium School of Evolution jointly with Dr. Niles Eldredge. They thoroughly probed the stratigraphical, sedimentological and biological aspects of the fossil

record to confirm short episodic patterns of rapid evolution followed by long periods of stability. This, they said, reflected the reality of history of life and led to "...a sequence of stable fossil populations separated by morphological breaks." Though argued about by some palaeontologists (e.g. Sylvester-Bradley, P. C. 1977, pp. 41-63, in, Kauffman, E. G. and Hazel, J. E., eds., *Concepts and Methods of Biostratigraphy*; Adams, C. G. 1983, pp. 255-289. in, Sims, R. W., Price, J. H. and Whalley, P. E., eds., *Evolution, Time and Space: The Emergence of the Biosphere*), this theory has been widely acclaimed and seems to provide a supportive perspective for empirical biostratigraphy.

Throughout his academic life, his main concern was to emphasise the hierarchy of levels of evolution: biochemical, genetic, embryological, physiological, individual, species and lineages. He believed that selection "...on any of these produces significant effects on the level above or below it - a promising and largely unexplored area", which seems to have considerable importance in Evolutionary Biology (based on *Stephen Jay Gould biography* by Richard Milner).

Prof. Gould was also a popular writer and was best known for a series of essays, "This View of Life," which he continued to write for over 25 years for a magazine *Natural History*. This series presented his evolutionary perspective in matters of

philosophy, history, science, art and literature. He popularised the Study of Evolution in America where the teaching of evolution in the public schools was considered a taboo some years ago. It is largely through his efforts that evolution is now recognised as an important aspect of human-dominated ecosystem where the evolutionary process may take an altered course in the wake of rapidly declining biological diversity. The latter is a matter of concern for us all. His writings created a general awareness about evolution and won wide appreciation for him. However, antievolutionists, irked by the rising popularity of the study of evolution, raised controversies over his books and called him *America's Evolutionist Laureate* in sheer desperation. He was never ruffled by them and defended his cause with courage of conviction.

Gould received due recognition for his work and was honoured for his writings by several organisations. Two of his most notable books, *The*

Panda's Thumb and *The Mismeasure of Man*, were among the bestsellers and brought him several awards (e.g. American Library Association Award, American Book Award in Science). He was a member/fellow of several learned societies/associations (e.g. American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Paleontological Society, etc.).

Gould was a gentleman besides being a scientist and had an acute sense of perception and judgement. Niles Eldredge described him as a person who "...can sense the gist of an important issue and cut to the chase faster than anyone else...". In his death, the world has lost a personality who was wedded to the cause of Palaeontology and the Study of Evolution and was endowed with an extraordinary intellectual calibre. He leaves behind his family members, colleagues, friends and admirers to mourn his sad passing away, and a legacy of vision and intellectual traditions to inspire his successors.

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