

The Relationship between God & the Universe

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For many of us, God seems to be a very distant idea, residing millions of miles away in a colony. If we are Vishnu bhaktas, then this colony is called Vaikuntam. On the other hand, if we are Śiva bhaktas, the colony is called Kailasa. Movies, and artistic renderings have made use of some references in the *purāṇas* to sharpen this idea even more and have presented it to us in a dramatic fashion. This has left a deep impression and a mental model in us that God is in a remote place, to be perhaps reached after this life and so on. This idea of God and his abode cannot appeal to a person with common sense as the target is simply out of one's reach and the means are also very vague, hard etc. Above all, this model also suggests that the possibility of reaching God is also remote in this life.

Making Sense of our Universe

Another issue pertains to making sense of the Universe around us. Is it merely an assemblage of basic elements subject to laws of physics and chemistry, as modern science is postulating? Does the all-powerful God has any role in creating this Universe or has it manifested on its own? Who supplied the raw material initially to manufacture over six billion different species belonging to the animal and plant kingdom so that they could find a way to perpetuate? Is there an underlying pattern behind these endless varieties of living and non-living entities in this world? These are fascinating questions to any true seeker of higher knowledge, including our modern day scientists. Current studies in the origin of the universe are pursuing the so called "God particle" which is supposed to explain these questions satisfactorily. It is a work in progress with many challenges and logical dead ends and the journey is on.

Our ancestors were equally inquisitive about these issues and have found their answers to these questions. This issue has been the subject matter of our *Upaniṣads*, *Purāṇas* etc. and each of these body of knowledge has taken its unique approach to answer some these questions. In *Bhagavad Gītā*, Shri Krishna has addressed these questions. We shall look at a couple of *ślokas* from chapter 7 to understand this.

The Universe is nothing but a Manifestation of God

First Shri Krishna introduces the basic pattern that we will find in all these endless varieties in the Universe. He says that three basic elements of the pattern are Sattva (*Sāttvikaḥ bhāvāh*), Rajas (*Rājasā bhāvāh*) and Tamas (*Tāmasā bhāvāh*). These three are often referred to as *tri-guṇas*. He further makes two important observations:

- Know (*viddhi*) that these three elements originated from Me (read Divine Lord) (*matta eveti*)
- I am not in them (*na tvahaṃ teṣu*), but they are in Me (*te mayi*)

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ये चैव सात्त्विका भावा राजसास्तामसाश्च ये ।
मत्त एवेति तान्विद्धि न त्वहं तेषु ते मयि ॥ 7.12

*ye caiva sāttvikā bhāvā rājasāstāmasāśca ye,
matta eveti tānviddhi na tvahaṃ teṣu te mayi.*

After introducing the basic elements, Shri Krishna proclaims that everything in this Universe (*sarvam idaṃ jagat*) is deluded (*mohitaṃ*) by these three basic elements (*bhāvair-ebhiḥ tribhir-guṇamayaiḥ*). People with lack of right knowledge do not know Me (the Lord) (*mām nābhijānāti*) to be in contrast to these (*ebhyaḥ*) ultimate (*param*) and imperishable (*avyayam*).

त्रिभिर्गुणमयैर्भावैरेभिः सर्वमिदं जगत् ।
मोहितं नाभिजानाति मामेभ्यः परमव्ययम् ॥ 7.13

*tribhir-guṇamayair-bhāvair-ebhiḥ sarvam-idaṃ jagat,
mohitaṃ nābhijānāti mām-ebhyaḥ param-avyayam.*

These descriptions appear too cryptic and even confusing. For instance, what does it mean to say, “the Lord is not in the *triguṇas* but the *triguṇas* are in the Lord”? This requires careful understanding and deeper appreciation. Another question that needs some explanation is, “How do the three basic elements account for the large diversity”? We shall discuss these issues in some detail. In fact the most part of the second triplet of *Gītā* has expanded this idea in more than one dimension.

The Notion of *Kāraṇa* and *Kārya*

Let us first resolve the paradox of “I am not in them, but they are in Me”. Let us consider a set of items made of Gold, say bangle, necklace, ear stud and ring. If we ask what is common to all of them, it is simply the ornament grade gold. If we melt all these ornaments they will return to their native form, which is gold. In this example, the gold is the cause (*Kāraṇa*) and the ornaments are the effects (*Kārya*). One can make a similar statement with respect to many things that we see in the world. For example all wooden artefacts are the *Kārya* obtained out of wood, the *Kāraṇa*.

It is but natural to make a statement that “the effect” is potentially resident in “the cause” but not vice versa. In other words, what we mean to say is that the superset is *Kāraṇa* and the subset is *Kārya*. We call *Kāraṇa* as superset simply because it cannot be destroyed. On the other hand, all the different manifestations (*Kārya*) when destroyed will return to its original state, the *Kāraṇa*.

Shri Krishna is pointing to this analogy to explain to us that the universe is a *Kārya* and the Lord is indeed the *Kāraṇa*. It therefore becomes clear that the Lord is imperishable but the universe is perishable. It is no wonder that however large the number could be, we are still computing the age of the universe, thereby acknowledging that it started on a particular day. Anything that had a beginning has to have an end, however long the duration of its existence be.

Building Blocks of the Diversity of the Universe

In the *śloka* it was mentioned that the manufacturing of the countless forms and shapes of the universe was orchestrated using *triguṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*). If everything is coming from a single source, then there must be a mechanism to “manufacture” this infinite variety. This is not a new idea for us and there are many examples of this. Let us consider preparing a presentation for a meeting using Powerpoint. In our presentation we may include a box with a bulleted list of items and may want to fill the box with a colour. If we open a colour pallet, it allows us to create our own shade of colour using a combination of RGB. By changing the RGB numbers we can end up creating a very large number of shades of colour.

The Lord uses the same mechanism to create the world of multiplicity (in fact we have learnt it from the Lord!). The RGB that the Lord uses is the *triguṇas* (*sattva – raja – tamas*). In fact the Lord uses this RGB in a certain proportion to arrive at the overall *guṇa* of a variant to create the world of multiplicity. Once a new variant is formed, it should be given a name (*Nāma*) and shape (*Rūpam*) in addition to its properties (*guṇa*). This will complete the process. In our ornament example, the moment we say we have a golden ring, we have included all the above in the definition and created a unique variant.

What we are able to infer is that all the names and forms that constitute this world of multiplicity is nothing but a manifestation of divinity in a myriad combination of certain basic materials. The Lord which is the cause for all these generates the world of multiplicity by using two of its fundamental aspects. One is designated as *Puruṣa* and the other *Prakṛti*. The *Prakṛti* provides the basic building blocks to create the world of multiplicity (the effect). On the other hand, the *Puruṣa* provides the existence (*sat*), and consciousness (*cit*), (the cause). Therefore, the world of multiplicity can be represented in the form of an equation below:

$$\{Sat + Cit\} + \{Guṇa + Nāma + Rūpam\} = World\ of\ multiplicity$$

The way in which the *triguṇas* combine and provide an overall composite *guṇa* is a vast subject in itself. We do not want to get into that at this stage. The *Sāṃkhya* system provides details on this process.

This very idea that the word of names and forms, comprising of non-living entities such as rocks and rivers and living entities such as the animal and the plant kingdom is indeed nothing but divine manifestations has the potential to provide a life changing perspective to us. The most important aspect of this perspective is that God is not a remote idea but an everyday companion and next door neighbour for all of us. We need to deeply contemplate on the meaning and implication of this reality.