

Prakṛti: The architect of the Universe

B Mahadevan¹

According to a report by BBC News in 2011, the world contains about **8.7 million species** estimated by scientists. The report further observed that a vast majority of these have not been identified and cataloguing them all could take more than 1,000 years. The question naturally is who designed and manufactured the first batch of each of these species and put in place a mechanism for perennial perpetuation.

There are some movies that display fantasy of unimaginable magnitude. Such movies present “hard to even imagine” ideas in such a grandeur that we get blown off by its effect. Even the best of such movies will pale in comparison with the current scientific theories that seek to explain the origin of the Universe and the living beings. In a nutshell these theories postulate the origin of the Universe with some basic building blocks. In the beginning there was nothing, perhaps a vast black hole which is “lifeless”. Out of this came the Universe with its matter, energy and sentient dimensions based on some conditions that are probabilistic (chance events).

The Universe: Beginning and the End?

The scientific community with all its progress is currently struggling hard to create one little piece of “life” out of lifeless matter through a process called cloning. While they may end up reasonably successful in this process in some cases on some day, it is still not clear whether such clones will survive long enough. Against this back drop of the reality how are we to believe that the “lifeless” black hole or some such entity indeed created more than 8 million unique living entities, that we have so far estimated, belonging to the plant and animal kingdom ranging from the one celled amoeba to the most complex and sophisticated species called human beings in this planet called Earth? And these entities have been living for time immemorial. Science does not even know how many planetary based solar systems exist in the Universe and what kind of life forms exist in such systems. Who has the “know-how” and the magical formula to create these entities? Is there a mega R & D laboratory functioning somewhere that perpetually engages in innovation?

Let us look at the second aspect. Simple scientific thinking informs us, that which had a beginning must have an end also. If this was not true, the creation process ought to have come to a grinding halt long time back as it will be unsustainable otherwise. This is a Universal truth and therefore applies to the Universe as well. While the scientific community agrees to this phenomenon of the Universe having a beginning and an end, they are not able to satisfactorily explain this. They are still struggling to find out how the origin of the Universe happened. They are equally clueless about the end of the Universe as well.

Finally, the current attempts to explain this phenomenon quickly treads into complex mathematics and probability theories to legitimately bring in the idea that these are perhaps triggered by chance events. When we reach our limits of logical explanation, probability theory comes in handy and provides the much needed helping hand.

¹ *B Mahadevan, a Professor at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore is currently the Vice Chancellor of Chinmaya Vishwa Vidyapeeth, a University for Sanskrit and Indic Traditions.*

Any logically thinking person would come to a conclusion that there ought to be some primordial “life giving” source with extraordinary sense of know-how and consciousness that ought to orchestrate these events. Further, leaving this all too important process of starting off and shutting down the mega engine called the Universe to some chance event is too presumptuous. At the minimum we need to recognize the play of the Divine force in this process, although we may not know exactly how. This is akin to saying, when a beautifully carved artefact is lying in front of us, we know for sure that there is a sculptor who created this. We may not know who it is, where that person is and how he/she obtained the know-how etc.

Just as the modern science presents alternative frameworks to explain this, in Indian spiritual tradition also this process is explained. One issue of interest is, “Just about the time when the Universe is coming to an end, what will happen to the entities? If a child was born a day or two before the Universe came to an end, does this child not have a fair chance of experiencing this world and evolving in its journey of life?” We shall see two *ślokas* from *Bhagavad Gītā* to understand this.

Universe: A Cyclic process of the Lord

Shri Krishna says that at the end of every *Kalpa* (*kalpa-kṣaye*) all the living entities (*sarva-bhūtāni*), at that time, are absorbed (*yānti*) into Me through my aspect (*māmikām*) called *Prakṛti* (*prakṛtiṃ*). However, at the beginning of the next *Kalpa* (*kalpādau*) I bring back or recreate (*visṛjāmy-aham*) once again all of them (*punastāni*).

सर्वभूतानि कौन्तेय प्रकृतिं यान्ति मामिकाम् ।
कल्पक्षये पुनस्तानि कल्पादौ विसृजाम्यहम् ॥ 9.07

sarva-bhūtāni kaunteya prakṛtiṃ yānti māmikām
kalpa-kṣaye punastāni kalpādau visṛjāmy-aham

Through the above *śloka*, Shri Krishna categorically reiterates that lifeless forms are not creating living entities at the throw of a dice. It is indeed a divine force at play. The triggering of this by chance is replaced by a pre-determined time-window called “*Kalpa*”². The divine aspect that engages itself in this creation and the absorption process is termed as *Prakṛti*. Viewed in this manner, the *Prakṛti* indeed becomes the representative of the divine entity that is charged with the responsibility of creation and destruction of the Universe in fixed time intervals in a repeated fashion.

Another interesting dimension that emerges out of this *śloka* is that the creation and destruction of the Universe are indeed merely a manifestation and unmanifestation phases respectively of the Divinity. Such a view relieves us from the complexity associated with understanding where from the enormous quantum of energy suddenly manifested when the Universe was created afresh. It also relieves us from understanding

² Detailed description of the time span for a *Kalpa* and the process are available in a few *ślokas* in chapter 8 of *Bhagavad Gītā*. It is discussed separately in another write-up.

the mystery of where does all these energy suddenly dissipate when the Universe comes to an end.

To make these assertions quite unambiguous, Shri Krishna further states that I take upon Myself (*svām-avaṣṭabhya*) the aspect called *Prakṛiti* (*prakṛtiṃ*) and I subject the entire gamut of the living entities (*bhūtagrāmam-imaṃ kṛtsnam*) again and again (*punaḥ punaḥ*) to this process of manifestation and unmanifestation (*visṛjāmi*). Therefore, this process pertaining to the entire living beings is in the hands of *Prakṛti* (*prakṛter-vaśāt*) and the living beings themselves have no control (*avaśaṃ*).

प्रकृतिं स्वामवष्टभ्य विसृजामि पुनः पुनः ।
भूतग्राममिमं कृत्स्नमवशं प्रकृतेर्वशात् ॥ 9.08

prakṛtiṃ svām-avaṣṭabhya visṛjāmi punaḥ punaḥ
bhūtagrāmam-imaṃ kṛtsnam-avaśaṃ prakṛter-vaśāt

The Great Hibernation

Self-evolution and attaining liberation is the only goal for all individuals in their lives. They may take alternative routes and invest their efforts to achieve this goal. Some might think that the only way to achieve this to accumulate a lot of wealth; some others may think one needs to become famous to achieve this. A third person may think the means is to help the poor and the needy. One life time may not be enough as several dead ends will be met in this journey. Therefore, we need a fair process and assured continuity in this journey in the context of the Universe coming to an end. Otherwise, it is like reaching the playground late (for reasons that are not at all attributed to us) and being told that the game will be shut down in a few minutes.

Today, our orientation towards realization of end results and fruits of action “here and now” is guided by some implicit understanding that time is running out. In the Semitic religious thought this may be true, as the possibility of rebirth does not exist. On the other hand, the *ślokas* point to us to the possibility of a hibernation process similar to what we see in the use of computers. The hibernation process as suggested in the *ślokas* provides a fair opportunity for an individual to self-evolve and attain perfection. This encourages one to engage in good actions and a right way of living not worrying about when the results will fructify.

For the Lord who could design and manufacture 8 million unique species, hibernating the living beings at the end of one cycle and bringing them back to the Universe again ought to be a much simpler task. It is this faith that will guide us towards the path of attaining liberation without much fear, doubt or pressure.