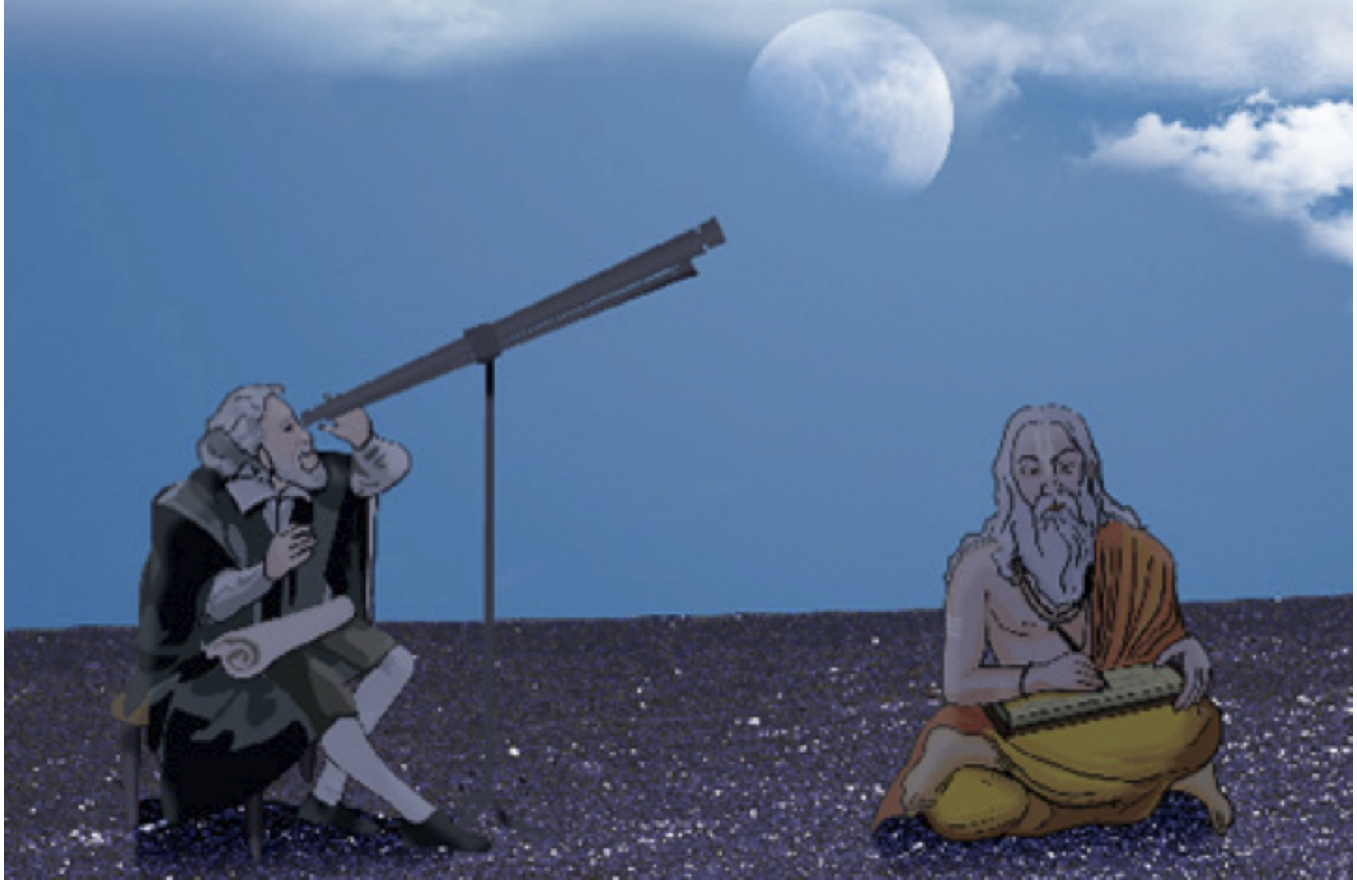
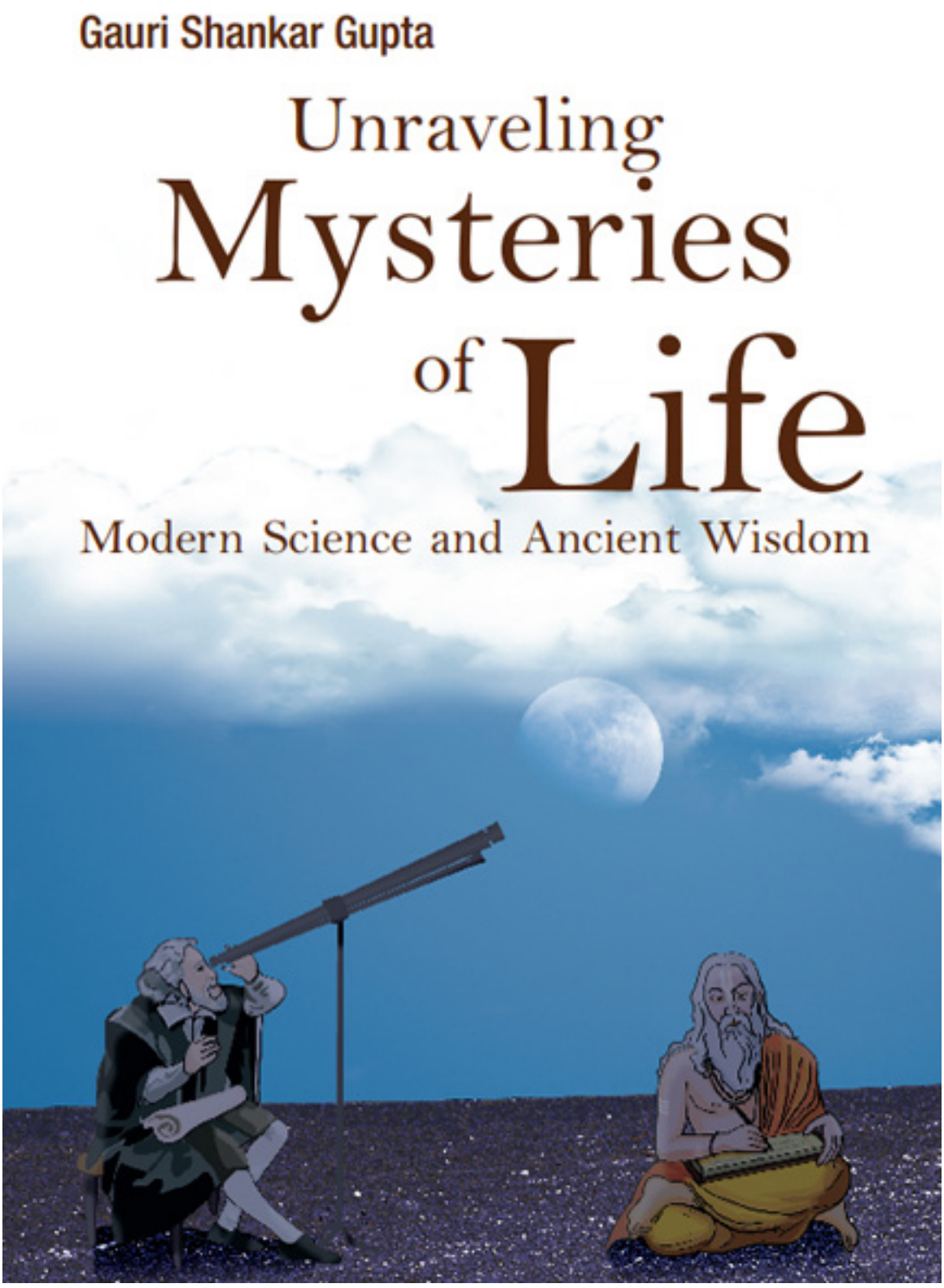
Gauri Shankar Gupta

Unraveling Mysteries of Life

Modern Science and Ancient Wisdom





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Foreword

The goals that we set for ourselves individually and collectively depend on the answers we give to the fundamental question "Who am I?" For example, if I think, "I am an American man," I behave as such.

Today, the most influential answers to the question "Who am I?" come from modern science, and the answers that modern science gives are somewhat materialistic. All of us experience ourselves as conscious individuals, however, according to the dominant ideas in modern cognitive science, consciousness is only a temporary byproduct of biochemical activity in the brain. Matter, if arranged in a sufficiently complex way in the brain, produces consciousness. Thus, matter is primary. At the time of death, when the biochemical activity in the brain ceases, consciousness ceases to exist.

So then what are we really? According to the view outlined above, we are machines made of molecules. Not only that, we are machines made of molecules in competition with each other for survival. These are the dominant scientific ideas about human nature in the present age. Although people may privately have other ideas about human nature, these dominant ideas are the ones that are taught in the tax-supported education systems all over the world. In addition, these are the ideas that inform government policy-making. The result is that people all over the world have become very materialistic in terms of their goals, even if they are nominally religious. Most people, and governments, believe that producing and consuming more and more material things, in competition with other individuals and groups, is the main purpose of human life.

The focus of modern science on matter and its interactions has been productive. It has enabled human society to make progress technologically and economically. However, the progress has come at some cost: environmental degradation, financial crises, inequitable distribution of wealth, and seemingly endless wars and social disturbances. The solution to these problems must involve reexamining some of the fundamental assumptions modern science makes about the origin of life and the universe. The modern scientific world is matter-based. It has little room for consciousness, except as a temporary byproduct of bioelectrical activity in the brain. In contrast, what if consciousness can exist apart from matter? What if we are not just machines made of molecules, but are a combination of consciousness and matter? What if matter does not produce consciousness, but merely covers consciousness? This leads to the idea that originally consciousness existed free from matter. This suggests that a major goal of life should be to free consciousness from its contact with matter. What would a human society based on such ideas look like? What would its science be like? What would its healthcare system be like? What would its political life be like? What would its economics be like? What would its ethics be like? These are the kinds of questions that Gauri

Shankar Gupta explores in his thought-provoking book 'Unraveling Mysteries of Life' (Modern Science and Ancient Wisdom). Gupta is a true man of the world. For over 32 years, he has served in diplomatic posts for the government of India in various parts of the world, ranging from Mongolia to Hungary, where I had the honor of meeting him in Budapest. He is well informed about the problems and challenges facing human society in the twenty-first century. He has wide knowledge of modern scientific and intellectual developments. However, he is also acquainted with the wisdom of the past. Moreover, this acquaintance is not narrow. In addition to drawing on the vast reservoirs of India's Vedic tradition, he has also deeply investigated the teachings of the ancient Greek philosophers. He is thus well equipped to speak to an international audience of intellectuals, religionists, and political leaders about the nature of our modern problems and the way forward to practical solutions. The solutions Gupta presents are based on the best that modern science and ancient wisdom have to offer us.

In his fascinating book, Gupta demonstrates that the civilizations of ancient India and Greece were not without astonishing scientific and technological achievements. Thus, these scientific and technological achievements were embedded within larger systems of wisdom that offered the chance to avoid some of the disturbances and problems associated with the growth of modern science and technology. As the modern world looks to the future for solutions to its problems, Gupta suggests that a look to the resources of the past may yield essential clues and helpful direction. We can learn more about who we really are. Not only can we learn more about where we are. According to Gupta, we exist in a consciousness-based universe that operates not just according to the laws of chemistry and physics, but according to more subtle laws such as the laws of karma, which unfold in the course of cyclical time. People who do not have a realistic conception of who they are and where they are will certainly not be able to act in their own best self-interest. They are bound to behave in ways that produce results the opposite of what they intend. By offering new ways of understanding who we are and where we are, based on his deep acquaintance with sources of traditional wisdom, both Eastern and Western, Gupta gives us hope of a better future.

Michael A. Cremo

Los Angeles, February 17, 2012

About the book

This book will not be kept on my bookshelf but will remain on my table and I'm going to read it for the rest of my life.

I'm going to learn from it and will meditate on issues covered in it.

I don't feel it's possible to write a foreword that could truly justify its manifold greatness. It needs neither a commentary nor a preface, nor any kind of introduction or reflection. When someone stops at the feet of the Himalayas, unless he is simple minded, he doesn't start to chatter; he would instead marvel at the beauty and magnificence before them.

Therefore, instead of writing a foreword let me share a confession with you.

Through the greatest Grace of my life, I became acquainted with India's wisdom pretty early.

I have never really talked about it, neither I have ever mentioned or referred to it in my books. However India has influenced both my thinking as well as my approach to life. All that limited knowledge I so eagerly collected about the wisdom of India during these decades made my destiny a bit lighter. I was living in a world of ideologies, theories and religions either being fiercely contested or hated by each other. For me, the spirituality of India was the lighthouse at the shores of the dark and unsettled ocean of our age.

In my opinion it was by the grace of God, Gupta would say providence, that I could find all those

masterpieces which were not only forbidden but simply could not be found at a time when Marxism/Leninism were the enforced 'religion' of Hungary.

Still to this very day I cannot imagine how I managed to find the Bhagvad Gita, the Upanishads or the Patanjali's Yoga-sutras.

Thanks to India, to say the least, those very two words, grace and karma, have never confused me. I always felt that the two words are cousins of each other even though one of them is rather religious and Christian in its nature and the other one is an ancient and metaphysical expression. A wise Christian would state that the God is not a watch-maker who created the world as a machine (machina mundi) to function by itself; rather an organ builder as well as an organ player. We are like the pipes of an organ and He is the person blowing breath and life into us. What else could it be if not grace or the gift of God?

I have often thought that our whole life is nothing but grace, the Grace of God and that because of thoughts that were sown in me in bygone times, when I was a child, I have thus brought forth fruits that I could later harvest.

Not to comprehend karma as a rigid mechanical law or even a kind of punishment but as a divine gift; was something I learned from the benevolent wise Eastern masters.

It was Béla Hamvas[1] *the forbidden master, "famously condemned to anonymity" who opened my eyes.*

"Veda is the ultimate knowledge", he writes. "During the time of collapse of the world if only one book could be saved that must only be the Veda"

Why?

He answers:

"Lot of great and valuable heritage of the universal human traditions have been preserved, but there is only one system containing the truth being unifying, comprehensive that opens up the deepest foundation and that is the unparalleled ancient memory, Veda."

Hamvas remained a Christian till the end of his life as I am.

Nevertheless, I dare to state that the most important teachings of Jesus cannot be comprehended without knowing the Vedas and the ancient Indian traditions.

The parables which state; "The World of God rests in you", or "The Father is in Me and I am in the Father", or when Christ was accused and told, "You make yourself God" to which he answered to his forefather, King David, referring to all people, "You are God", were seldom understood in his age. He provoked such fierce opposition and protest amongst the fanatics, especially priests until he was finally crucified.

(This was the main accusation against Him and this very thought and especially the personal experience of "God lives in us" is a prerequisite for understanding the Vedas. It is unfortunate that this is still so far away from so many Christian believers.)

We do not know whether Jesus had ever been in India, however, he must have known the wisdom of the Vedas. Why? It is because that is the "ultimate knowledge". It does not belong to India, neither to East, nor to time, nor to space, as it is eternal.

And it is human.

And it is divine.

It was, it is and it will be.

All those who speak the truth, wherever or whenever, know this knowledge. The person who does not know it will not speak the truth.

The wisdom, Gupta relies on and carries in his heart and soul is not a religion, nor a philosophy, nor a belief, nor a science; but is a metaphysical knowledge. It is the only and absolute ancient knowledge, which deals with questions that govern the world and human existence.

It is the very foundation of the existence of humanity.

I have read many books on these issues during the past half a century.

I had two problems with them.

Firstly, some of the books were written by a guru born, grew up and lived in the spirit of ancient

Indian culture, and did not really know much about our Western way of thinking.

Secondly, books were written by Western scientists or enthusiastic India scholars who had never lived "in the spirit of yoga". Hence the wisdom of the Vedas could not really run in their blood, but was merely understood intellectually.

The Gurus from the East did not really know to whom they were speaking to and did not realize that in order to make us understand the eternal truths, first they should have known our knowledge, our philosophy, our religion, our science and especially our worldly approach and ethos.

Verses of the Sacred Writings were chanted usually by people wearing ancient gowns; practicing traditions and rituals. This left an impact on us, Europeans as a Hellenic play, as if the play of Oedipus the King would have been performed exclusively in antique costumes with masks, in antique forms in the ruins of one of the once marvelous Greek amphitheatres.

Thus, if it was valid only then and in the way they performed it, more than two thousands year ago.

Many of those authentic gurus do not know that one single thing is everlasting and which renews itself day by day.

We do not have to wear sari and smell sandalwood incense in order to be able to acquire the truth.

Although, undoubtedly the ancient surroundings and the world of India, which seems to be so mystical for Western people, has still got a unique attraction; that is simply an external attraction, the illusion of "fabulous India" that has nothing really to do with the Truth.

It has nothing to do with the reality that Gupta and the ancient tradition define as sat.

As a matter of fact, Western scientists and authors captured by the Vedic wisdom have been too analytical, too rational. They tried to interpret Vedas in a very complicated manner, which in the original writings were secret, mysterious, beautiful and poetic.

It is not enough to know something intellectually but it should be experienced as well; as both are encompassed in the Sanskrit word, vidya, if one could experience them.

He, who merely understands but does not experience, speaks in a different language compared to the one who understands and experiences.

And here we have come to Gauri Shankar Gupta's book.

The very rare and captivating feature of this book is that its language is pretty simple.

He does not explain.

He does not argue.

He does not discuss.

He does not agitate nor does he preach.

He only teaches.

In a way you cannot even realize.

He does not want to convince, only speaks.

Calmly and precisely.

Very simply, and in a sensible way with examples that even children would understand.

This is the way he can tell what only few could for example: what God is.

Brahman.

All can understand, whether they are an astronomer, an atomic physicist or a housewife searching for God.

Only those who live it can speak about truth in such a simple manner.

It is the most difficult task.

Gupta uses examples understandable for ordinary man.

He unveils the Mysteries of Life without you noticing it.

Contrary to the Western worldly approach to life that states Being and Truth are extremely complicated and cannot be comprehended by human intellect, here we can learn that it is not so. Life is eternally rich but not "complicated".

It is a miracle but not unrealizable and furthermore the Ultimate Truth is not incomprehensible

but incredibly simple.

However, one needs to be mature enough to understand it.

He is not saying anything new because everyone knows it deep in their hearts.

Buddha said that, "The lesson that cannot be understood is worthless".

Gauri Shankar Gupta's attitude as a teacher lays on the same foundation.

He presents the world's most profound knowledge in simple and understandable language.

Yet another connected thought.

For the last fifty years, I have developed a kind of sense to distinguish between the authentic teachers and the fake ones.

What epitomizes his work is not necessarily the content but the way he presents it. The way he speaks to me.

The authentic teacher is calm.

He does not want to convince, or preach, he does not desire to have an effect on me violently or passionately.

He lets the truth prevail.

Those who have ears to hear will hear it.

While grasping the greatest knowledge and power, he speaks gently and considerately.

Furthermore, he speaks so quietly those who would like to hear him should lean closer to hear him better.

This author speaks this way.

That is why I say: it is not enough to read this book once but it needs to be read again and again; if one is to truly learn from it.

The most important part was left at the end.

Gauri Shankar Gupta has a very unique ability of thinking with the head of others.

He knows Western culture and science, astronomy and atomic physics. He knows our soul, our anguish, our doubts, delusions, obsessions and disorders that penetrate our individual and social life both.

He knows our unanswered questions; he is familiar in the chaos of the world crisis or to be more precise, he is capable of seeing our life through our glasses.

He knows precisely what people he is writing to are thinking of and where they stand at present.

Only a few masters are able to do this.

The reason for being that not only might their knowledge be lacking, but also their talent.

They may be well-versed and wise but not masters, as they are not able to impart their thoughts.

They cannot sense the other person's mind and soul, do not know how the person to whom they speak sees the world.

Gupta knows.

He knew before he sent me the script of this book, sensing or knowing somehow, that it would have special significance to me and would capture me.

He might have even foreseen that I have some previous knowledge relating to it, which would enable me to write this foreword.

This is because he knows well the viewpoints of Western science and its mentality as I do; and I also know something here and there about the secrets of India, collected from different kinds of sources in the last fifty years.

We met as old acquaintances but for the first time in this life.

His book is familiar, too.

I have been waiting for it: because it was missing.

Péter Müller
Budapest, May 27, 2012

*Since the inception of the industrial revolution in the 18*th *century, scientific and technological developments have had a profound effect on humanity as a whole. Developments in transport, communication and production systems; medicine, biological and genetic sciences; new materials; nuclear technology; space research and digital technology have transformed human life beyond recognition. Modes of transport have catapulted human life from simple horse drawn carriages to spacecraft cruising at unprecedented speeds into outer space. Simple wooden boats have been transformed into large luxurious sea cruisers, which are no less than floating cities on the ocean surface. Simple two-way oral communication has travelled a long way to high speed wireless internet and cellular and satellite phones with instant connectivity all around the globe and beyond. Traditional small and cottage industries have been transformed into large scale production units with unprecedented automation, churning out billions of products every day to satisfy ever growing human desires. Genetic and medical sciences have precisely mapped the human genome and body organs; and have invented highly complex systems of diagnosis, medication and surgical intervention. From simple bows and arrows, the weapons industry has evolved to creating long distance to inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and nuclear sub-marines bringing the entire globe within their range. Sophisticated nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and highly advanced systems of their delivery have replaced sword-wielding foot soldiers. New means of production and transmission of energy have intruded into every sphere of our life from cooking to washing to shopping to entertainment to production to transportation and communication. Similar transformations could be seen in many other fields of human life. Internet, cellular and digital connectivity have reduced the world to a global village.*

Most of these amazing transformations have occurred in our own lifetime. Moreover the pace of transformation continues unabated and at an ever increasing speed. We are in for many more future shocks with growing appetite for innovations and ever increasing competition. Innovations and technology have become the hallmarks of modern society. Tipping points are reached in multiple areas on a daily basis, leading to path-breaking innovations and new technologies in diverse fields. With these unprecedented technological advances during the last two centuries, there is a growing tendency to discard our ancestors and their lifestyle as primitive and unscientific. Quite often their lifestyle is talked about in derogatory terms. This led me to think aloud. If such advances in science and technology did not take place in the past, what could be the reason for it? Were not our ancestors intelligent enough? If so, how could highly developed civilizations exist in several parts of the world? How could they construct highly sophisticated temples and other structures in Egypt, Greece, Italy, India and China? Even the most sophisticated high-rise buildings of modern era appear pigmies compared to those ancient structures. How could they develop highly scientific languages and astronomical charts based on advanced mathematical equations? How come their writings on basic issues of life and existence are still considered not only relevant but sacrosanct? Do these ancient writings provide any clue to their thinking process? Do the modern scientific discoveries provide better answers to the basic issues of existence such as origin and functioning of the universe, evolution of life, interaction between human civilization and nature, the purpose of human life, human development and human happiness? Are these unprecedented innovations and discoveries and large scale production technologies leading to human well-being and happiness or are they merely creating an illusion of happiness?

This book attempts to address some of these fundamental questions through comparative study of the discoveries of modern science and the wisdom of ancient writings left behind by our ancestors. Widely accepted contemporary scientific theories, discoveries and inventions addressing fundamental issues of life and existence constitute the basis of modern scientific explanations. The Vedic and some ancient Greek writings constitute the core of ancient wisdom expounding on these

basic issues. The Upanishads, the Bhagvad Gita, the Brahman Sutra, the Srimad Bhagavatam and the Mahabharata constitute the primary source of ancient Indian wisdom. Relevant writings of pre-Socratic times and those of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus constitute the primary source of ancient wisdom from Greece.

Based on the comparative study of the two, an attempt has been made to address some of the mysteries of creation and the purpose of human life. Following the comparative study of the two, the book brings out the relevance and richness of the ancient wisdom. Although modern science and new technologies have transformed human life beyond recognition through spectacular material comforts, these have failed to address the basic questions of life and existence. Human happiness remains elusive despite these material comforts and scientific advances. Humanity is getting lost into details forgetting the fundamentals. The question whether the ancient wisdom is based on scientific discoveries or is merely philosophical in nature has also been analyzed in a step by step approach. Fundamental issues addressed in this book include the origin of the universe, mysteries of the universe, the creation/evolution of life, human health, the play of human life, the mission of life, the meaning of development and human happiness.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part deals with macro issues. These include chapters on the origin of the universe, the power of the empty space, cosmic order or the functioning of the universe, cosmic energy, the idea of development or what constitutes development and human health and medical sciences. The second part deals with issues concerning the constitution of a human being (who am I), human behavior, human desires, the purpose of life and human happiness. The following is the brief outline of these chapters.

Origin of the Universe

The origin and source of this vast entity called the universe has always been a subject of curiosity. At least once in a while in our lifetime each one of us must have thought with awe and wonder of this magnificent creation while gazing at the vast blue sky at night studded with millions of stars and waning and waxing moon. What constitutes the universe? Is the universe finite and measurable? If so, what lies beyond it? When and how did it originate? Does it have a beginning? If so, what existed before its origin? Was it created by somebody? If so, who created the creator? These are some of the fundamental questions that have been agitating human mind since times immemorial. With advances in modern science, several explanations are available on these mysterious questions. This chapter analyses the most widely accepted explanations provided by modern scientific theories to these questions based on the Copernican Principles, Big Bang Theory, Edwin Hubble's Law, and Quantum Physics. Thereafter explanations given in ancient Indian and Greek writings addressing these mysteries of the nature have been examined to explain the origin of the universe and other related questions.

Power of the Empty Space

Whether we realize or not, we are always surrounded by space. Probably over 99% of the universe consists of nothing but empty-looking space. Space is the most subtle of all physical existence. Given its subtle nature, mysteries of space continue to defy the scientific community till date, despite path-breaking advances in the modern science. Let us leave aside the details; there is no consensus even on the definition of space. This short chapter has been devoted to understand the power and utility of this empty-looking space surrounding us. The chapter expounds as to how this empty-looking space is the most intelligent and the most essential element of the creation constituting the holding place for all physical and non-physical existence, their movement, and functioning. The chapter also amplifies as to how this empty-looking space remains unaffected even by violent movements and radical transformations constantly taking place in the universe.

Cosmic Order

Functioning of the universe continues to be one of the greatest mysteries of all times. Movement

of heavenly bodies, shooting stars, the cyclical nature of planetary rotation, creation and dissolution of life, change of seasons, interaction between nature and the consciousness and host of other natural phenomenon have always fascinated humanity. Is there an order in cosmic conduct or the universe is running merely by accident? How do the forces of nature function? Are there any laws governing these multiple forces? If so, who is the law-maker? If not, is it simply a matter of coincidence? How can we explain the origin of life? How does life sustain itself? Is there any time-cycle governing the evolution and dissolution of life? I have tried to address some of these questions in this chapter. Modern science based on the spectacular advances in physical sciences has provided an enormous amount of details about the movement of planets and stars, galaxies and inter-galactic space. Advances in biological sciences offer many explanations about the evolution of life. An overview of the explanations provided by modern science to these questions is based on the theory of conversion of energy into mass and mass into energy, the concept of Lambda, the theory of Big Bang and Big Compression, the theory of evolution by Charles Darwin and other well-known scientific theories. Subsequently, the ancient Vedic writings taken from various ancient Indian scriptures and writings by Greek philosophers have been examined to find answers to these mysteries of nature.

Cosmic Energy

The very survival of life depends on energy. Moreover, each one of the human activities revolves around energy. The food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, the fossil fuel we burn, the electricity we use in our daily life, the fuel we need to run a vehicle and the battery we need for our cell phone are some of the examples of the sources of energy. Is there a primary source of all such energies? If so, what is that source? What is the role of the sun in the energy cycle? This chapter brings out the pivotal role of the sun as the primary source of cosmic energy and how it impacts profoundly on life in general and human life in particular. The origin and functioning of cosmic energy as explained by the modern science as also in the ancient Vedic writings constitute the core of this chapter. The chapter also examines the Vedic concept of pranic energy and its functioning in the human body.

Idea of Development

What constitutes development? What are the defining elements of development? How do we measure development? Are the modern economic theories based on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and per capita income good enough indicators of development? What impact does the unbridled race for growth of GDP and per capita income have on human life? Is material development a synonym of human development? Are the large-scale production units and the supermarkets and mega-malls filled with millions of products leading to our happiness? This chapter tries to address these issues of our daily existence. An overview of Human Development Index computed by UNDP, excessive exploitation of natural resources and their impact on eco-system, other environmental issues and sustainable development have also been covered briefly in the course of this chapter. Thereafter the ancient concept of human development and quality of life has been compared with the modern one. Finally, the chapter tries to elaborate on the idea of development taking into account the primary objective of attaining human happiness and societal cohesion.

Human Health and Medical Sciences

Human body is the most miraculous and harmonious machine ever created. Every particle of the body is intelligent and performs multiple tasks simultaneously. Functioning of the nervous system and human brain are mind-boggling to say the least. The digestive system of living beings is the only machine that is capable of transforming the inanimate into animate. The body's self-sustaining and self healing properties are unparalleled. Good health is the greatest joy and the most important objective of life. What constitutes human health? How could we keep ourselves in good health? What is the role of human mind in the overall health of the body? How does the inanimate food we eat

convert into animate and intelligent body parts? What is pranic energy and what is its role in the human body? Spectacular advances in recent times in medical and bio-sciences have transformed the diagnostic techniques, pharmaceutical industry and surgical techniques. Super-specialization has reached a new zenith. Are these advances indeed helping human health and well-being? Are modern drugs, intrusive surgery and super-specialization better than the ancient holistic and non-invasive approach and herbal medication? Are the modern medical practices healing the basic disorders of human body or are they scratching on the surface treating only the symptoms? What about side-effects of drugs? What impact does modern lifestyle have on human health? On the whole, how does the modern medical system compare with the ancient medical practices such as yoga, ayurveda, acupuncture, homeopathy and other traditional medical practices? Will humanity be better off with herbal-based, holistic and non-invasive medical sciences developed by our ancestors? These and other similar issues constitute the core of this chapter.

Who Am I

Who am I and what constitutes me are fundamental and primeval questions. How many of us try to analyze and understand one's own self and the way we function? Reason dictates that one must understand the functioning of one's own self before we try to understand others. Normal tendency is to look outward rather than to look inward. We spend considerable time and energy in understanding others. Why? Therefore in this chapter I have tried to analyze the human constitution, inter-se relationship of these constituents and their functioning. Brief analysis of human body, senses, mind, intellect and soul constitutes the core of this chapter. Scientific explanations have been given to prove the existence of the human soul. Specific examples have been provided to explain the concept of gross and subtle and how the human constituents proceed from gross (human body and senses) to subtle (mind) to most subtle (soul). The chapter also touches on the role of pranic energy and the different states of human body. Known scientific explanations and the ancient Vedic writings have been used to elaborate on human constitution and its functioning.

Mind and Intellect

Seeds of all creation are first sown in the human mind. No action or innovations are possible unless a seed sprouts in human mind. Before a high-rise building is constructed, the idea of such an edifice must arise in someone's mind. Human thought of flying like a bird in the space gave birth to airplanes. Wars are won and lost in the minds of men, says UNESCO's constitution. This explains the enormous power of human mind. What is human mind? Where does this powerful constituent of human body exist? How does it function? What is the relationship between human brain, mind and intellect? What is the mind-body relationship? This chapter analyses the functioning of human mind and intellect, their powers and limitations and their role vis-a-vis human functioning and behavior.

Concept of Dharma

What is right and what is wrong? What is ethical and what is unethical? What should we do in a given situation and what should we not? Are there any moral absolutes? Every moment in our life we keep debating about right conduct and right behavior. More often than not we are in a state of dilemma. What is right conduct or behavior vis-a-vis one's spouse, children, parents, neighbours, superiors, subordinates and so on is a constant struggle we face in our daily life. The issue of right conduct keeps following us like a shadow both in our personal and official life. What is right in one place or country could be utterly wrong in another. Similarly what was right yesterday could be wrong today and what is right today could be wrong tomorrow. What impact do the societal laws, ethics, morality, religion and traditions have on the definition of right and wrong? Are there any yardsticks or standards to judge right and wrong? If so, what are they? These behavioral issues constitute the core of this chapter. These issues have been examined in the context of ancient Indian writings on the concept of dharma.

Law of Karma

We often meet people who are constantly suffering in life though they are honest, upright and hard-working. On the other hand, we also meet those who are intellectually impoverished and financially corrupt but are flourishing and doing quite well. Why is this gross injustice? Why some babies are born with a silver spoon in their mouth while some others in the conditions of extreme poverty and deprivation? Some people are lucky all the time while some others are invariably unlucky. Why? Do our actions have any role in our pains and pleasures? Or are they simply destined? What is destiny or providence? What role does it play in our lives and how? These questions have engaged human mind since antiquity. Different explanations are found in different civilizations. Is there a law governing human actions? If so, how does it operate? This chapter, therefore analyses the law of Karma (law of action and reaction), its operations and complexities with specific examples from our daily life.

Science of Maya

What is the real nature of the world we live in? Why does this world exist at all? Why do we have temptations or desires? Can these desires be satisfied? If yes, then how? If not, can we overcome these desires? What is the purpose of life? How do the desires for wealth, power and sex, attachment for the near and dear and individual ego impact on human behavior? Is the satisfaction of these desires the primary purpose of life? How does human creativity work? These are primeval questions with no simple and straightforward answers. In this chapter, I have examined the ancient Indian concept of maya to explain the nature and the functioning of the world and how human creativity is driven by the engine of maya. How does the magical power of maya keep us engaged ceaselessly under its spell? The relationship between human desires and maya and how they interact to keep us spellbound and engaged is yet another important aspect covered in this chapter.

Path to Happiness

What constitutes human life? What is the nature of human life? Why do we experience pleasure and pain in our daily existence? What is the role of time? What do we mean by happiness? Why do we look for happiness? Is happiness achievable at all or is it simply a mirage? If it is attainable then what is the path? This chapter addresses some of these basic facets affecting human life and analyses at the causes of pain and pleasure. Thereafter it synthesizes various aspects of human life and existence discussed in previous chapters to crystallize and clarify the idea of happiness and the mission of human life. The chapter also deliberates whether happiness can be achieved following the path laid down by modern science and contemporary lifestyle. Finally, based on the wisdom of our ancestors, some suggestions have been made to achieve true and lasting happiness in life.

An Overview

To summarize, I have made an attempt in this book to briefly but succinctly analyze the mysteries of creation, the functioning of natural forces and the basic issues of human existence, human life and human behavior, taking into account the findings of modern science and the wisdom left behind by our ancestors. These are highly complex issues with no simple answers. Even volumes may not be enough to explain them in detail. In fact, each chapter can be developed into a separate book. Therefore the idea behind this book is not to search for definitive or authoritative answers to these vexed issues but to provide an overview in one single volume to stimulate new thinking on ancient wisdom of our ancestors. The book also dispels the notion that our ancestors were primitive and not intelligent enough; and that modern science has reached horizons never reached before. Simultaneously, this work also aims at provoking new thinking on the wisdom and the validity and sustainability of the direction humanity is presently engaged with and pursuing.

The views expressed in this book are solely those of the author and are not intended to represent those of the Government of India.

To the Reader

Several pearls constitute one single pearl necklace. According to the ancient parable, each of them is different from the rest; yet each of them reflects to the other and the Whole.

Each one of them contains the other and the magnificent Whole at the same time.

The chapters in this book are similar to such pearls.

They talk about various issues; yet they refer to one central theme.

The chapters can be read separately or as a book.

Eastern Masters, as the parable of the pearls shows, have a particular method they apply: repeating.

This author of this book does the same.

On the one hand, he repeats for the better imprint of his thoughts. On the other hand, he applies it because everything is part of everything else. Through a new issue, identical thoughts appear in a very different light.

Péter Müller

Part I

"Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power. If you realize that you have enough, you are truly rich."

Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

"The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the World.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God.
Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust."

T. S. Eliot

Origin of the Universe

Creation has been the greatest puzzle of all times. The mysteries surrounding the origin, the nature and the functioning of the Universe have been a subject of immense curiosity and fascination since antiquity. Most intelligent as well as ordinary mortals have all engaged themselves in the pursuit of unraveling these mysteries of creation. Even after millions of years we still ask ourselves whether the Universe had an origin or a beginning. How did it come into existence? If it does have a beginning, what existed before the Universe came into existence? If nothing existed before its origin, how did it come into existence out of nothing? Will it come to an end one day and if so, then how? If it does come to an end where will it disappear? What constitutes the Universe? Is there a creator and if so who created the creator? Who regulates the functioning of this vast entity? Does it regulate itself, if so then how? These are mind boggling questions that have been agitating the minds of the humanity since times immemorial.

Does modern science with all its advances in physics, chemistry, astronomy and biology have answers to these questions or do they only pertain to the domain of religion and philosophy? Like us; our ancestors have also been pondering over these fundamental questions of our very existence. What are their answers? Let us try to undertake an objective assessment taking into account ancient writings as well as findings from modern science.

Defining the Universe

The Universe is the source and theatre of all existence; conscious and non-conscious; moving and non-moving; manifest and non-manifest. We cannot conceive of any existence outside of the Universe as it would defy the very definition of the Universe. Hence, all that exists owes its existence to the Universe. Simultaneously, the Universe is also an arena or theatre for all conceivable movements, actions and functions of all that exists. No movement or action is conceivable outside the Universe. Although it sounds ironic, collectively this very existence; moving and non-moving; conscious and non-conscious, manifest and non-manifest; together with their movements also constitute this universe. Therefore, if we have a closer look at the source, the creation and the theatre are one and the same. Let us take the example of our own planet earth. Firstly, planet earth owes its origin to the Universe. Secondly, it is an inalienable part of the Universe. Thirdly, the very existence of the earth, its rotation on its axis, its revolution around the sun, its atmosphere, movement of water-cycle on the earth's surface and in its atmosphere, growth of plants and herbs and creation and dissolution of life; all happen in this wonderful theatre called the 'universe'. Similarly, the solar system, the galaxies and the inter-galactic spaces owe their existence to the Universe. They also constitute an inalienable part of the Universe and simultaneously, the Universe also provides the playground for all their activities and movements.

Therefore to understand the mysteries of life and existence, we have to begin with this holding place of all existence and the playground of all actions and movements. In terms of definition the origin of the word 'universe' has been traced to the Latin word 'universum' or 'univorsum' which means everything rolled into one or everything combined into one. According to Encyclopedia Britannica the "universe is the whole cosmic system of matter and energy of which earth and therefore the human race is a part of". According to the Columbia Encyclopedia the "universe is the totality of matter and energy in existence". The Oxford Dictionary defines the Universe as "all existing matter and space considered as a whole; the cosmos. The universe is believed to be at least 10 billion light years in diameter and contains a vast number of galaxies". Thus, the Universe can be defined as the totality of everything that exists including time, space, matter and energy; the planets, stars, galaxies and the contents of the inter-galactic space. Hence, everything material and non-material, conscious and non-conscious and the vast empty looking spaces put together constitute the Universe.

Size and Nature

Now let us have a look at what modern science has to say about the size and nature of the Universe. Before we consider the revelations of modern science, I would like to caution that the

*scientific theories have been in constant flux, sometimes with sudden and radical changes. Every new discovery has invalidated many of those principles that were considered authentic for decades, sometimes for centuries. Therefore the knowledge that is considered authentic today could be invalidated tomorrow with new discoveries. For example as late as 1820 the Universe was thought by the European scientists to be only 6000 years old (this was based on the Biblical references to the birth of Adam on the 6*th *day of creation which is considered roughly 4000 years before Jesus Christ). Today, it is said to be over 13.7 billion years old. What a radical change! Similarly, until the 16*th *century the earth was considered flat and regarded as the centre of the Universe. Therefore it is evident that the knowledge or paradigms we have today are subject to change and hence are constantly being up-dated and not totally authentic. Moreover these scientific theories are neither universally accepted nor can they be proved except in a very limited way. I would therefore call these theories as provisional in nature. Based on these theories, the observable part of the Universe is estimated to have a diameter between 46 and 78 billion light years. Moreover scientific observations using powerful telescopes have also revealed that the Universe is still expanding. This expansion is estimated to be even faster than the speed of light. Therefore a fairly large part of the Universe remains a black hole and will continue to remain so. Since no observations are possible without light, a sizeable part of the Universe remains beyond the range of scientific observations. Astronomers' Saul Perlmutter, Brian P. Schmidt and Adam G. Reiss were awarded a Nobel Prize in Physics for 2011 for their discovery that the Universe is expanding at an accelerating pace and if the acceleration continues the cosmos will eventually freeze to ice. They were leaders of two competing teams of astrologers who measured the expansion of the Universe using data from exploding stars called supernovae as cosmic lighthouses. They found that the light emitted by these supernovae was weaker than expected, a sign that the Universe was expanding at an accelerated pace. The acceleration is believed to be driven by an unknown cosmic power called dark energy. A well-known science writer, Richard Panek, in his book "The 4% Universe: Dark Matter, Dark Energy and Race to Discover the Rest of Reality" has also confirmed that a substantial part of the Universe remains beyond the observable range and hence unknown. According to him, only 4% of the Universe is known to us and the remaining 96% is unknown. The scientists have named this unknown 'stuff' as 'dark matter' and 'dark energy'. It is estimated that 73% of the Universe consists of 'dark energy', 23% 'dark matter' and 4% ordinary matter. Hence it is apparent that the size of the Universe could actually be many times more than what is currently estimated.*

Let us now calculate the size of the Universe based on today's scientific assertions. According to the latest scientific discoveries the diameter of a galaxy is estimated to be about 30,000 to 100,000 light years. A minimum of 100 billion galaxies are said to be existing in the Universe. Given the average estimated distance between two galaxies of 3 million light years, the minimum size of the Universe works out to be 100,000,000,000 × (3,000,000 + 30,000) light years. These are mind boggling figures. Imagine if we convert these light years into kilometers or miles, the resultant figures would be beyond our comprehension. According to a study conducted in 2010 there are 300 sextillion stars in the Universe. These figures are based on present observations. With new scientific advances and better observation techniques these numbers in the future, could multiply many times. Since the Universe has been expanding faster than the speed of light the unobservable part of the Universe continues to increase every second. Even if by some miracle we were suddenly able to measure the entire universe as it exists today, it is hard to imagine how we could define what exists beyond those measurements or boundaries. Is that not a part of the Universe?

To understand the enormity of the Universe in its proper perspective, let us get an idea of the Milky Way, the galaxy which is supposed to be our home in this universe. Most of the stars we see in this galaxy are distant enough for us to comprehend. Just take the sun, our own star. According to scientific measurements based on the speed of light, the sun is approximately 150 million kilometers away from the earth. Sun-light takes approximately 8.32 minutes to reach the earth at a speed of 299,792.5 kilometers per second. When we talk about our sun we are talking of only one star in our own galaxy, the Milky Way. The Milky Way is estimated to be spread over at least 100,000 light

years. It is further estimated that the Milky Way alone has more than 200 billion stars, out of which we could see only about 5000 or so with our bare eyes. With the help of powerful telescopes the scientists have come to the conclusion that each galaxy has somewhere between 100 to 400 billion stars. Now imagine 100 billion galaxies, each with 100 to 400 billion stars and each star with several planets plus the inter-galactic space. This is only in the observable part of the Universe which is only 4% of the total. What about the part which is beyond observation as of now. These numbers, these enormous distances and then the functioning of each galactic system and within the galactic system, billions of sub-systems like our solar system are definitely beyond the comprehension of the human mind even with the help of the most powerful telescopes and super computers. Therefore, it is apparent that even the measurement of the Universe, despite the highly advanced scientific methods at our disposal, continues to evade the scientific community.

*From the galaxies and stars that are billions of light years away from us; let us now descend to mother earth. How much do we understand our own planet earth which is not even equal to a particle of dust in this vast universe? Until a few centuries ago, earth was considered flat with edges. Even directions were not clear. In the 16*th *century, Columbus, the Spanish explorer set on a voyage to the East to reach India but instead landed up in the West in Latin America. Similarly, until the 16*th *century the earth was considered to be stationary at the centre of the solar system with the sun, the moon, the other planets as well as the stars revolving around it. This theory was, however, contradicted by Nicholas Copernicus (1473–1543) in the 16*th *century who propounded in his treatise 'On the Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres' that the earth is not stationary at the centre of the Universe but orbits around the sun. When Nicholas Copernicus challenged the earth centric Ptolemaic view in favor of heliocentric approach, he was condemned by the Catholic Church for heresy. This dethronement of earth from the centre of the Universe caused profound shock since the Copernican system challenged the entire western view concerning the conception of the Universe. Therefore, his work was suppressed and his findings remained unpublished. In fact, it took another 300 years before the Catholic Church accepted the view that the sun was at the centre of the solar system and allowed Copernican work to be published in 1835. Even today, despite all the giant leaps in physics and other sciences, our understanding of our own planet earth is fairly limited. The formation of the earth, rotation on its axis, functioning of the biosphere, constitution of the ozone layer plus its functioning, the constitution and function of the magnetic field, geological formations, solar radiation, occurrences of earthquakes and volcanoes, chemical composition of the earth, the fertility of the soil, water bodies and water cycle, climatic conditions and climate change and a host of other such issues continue to pose major challenges to modern science. Since our understanding of our own planet earth is so limited, imagine the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead when we speak of the functioning of the Universe which is trillions of times larger than the earth with as many more variables. It is important to know these fantastic distances, trillions of physical objects and quintillions of variables involved, just to recognize the enormous complexities involved in the physical route to understand the nature of the Universe. We need to ponder whether this route could ever provide us with reliable information on the nature of the Universe!*

Big Bang

Let us now examine the widely accepted modern scientific doctrines on the origin of universe. As of now, the Big Bang theory is considered to be the most plausible explanation of the origin of universe. The theory propounded by George Lemaitre in 1927 was originally named as the 'Hypothesis of Primeval Atom'. According to this theory the Universe was originally in an extremely hot and dense state like a thermo-nuclear reactor (this is a conjecture based on regression in time as explained later in this chapter). All of a sudden for reasons not so evident the hot and dense state of universe started to expand rapidly following an explosion or 'Big Bang' some 13.7 billion years ago and continues to expand till today. Lemaitre suggested that the evident expansion of universe if projected back in time; meant that billions of years back in time the Universe was much smaller. If the projection is taken back until some finite time in the past when all the mass of the Universe was

concentrated into a single point a 'primal atom' then we would reach a point where and when the fabric of time and space came into being. Extrapolation of the expansion of the Universe back in time using general relativity yields an infinite density and temperature at a finite time in the past. This singularity (a term coined by physicists to describe regions of space that defy laws of physics) at a finite time in the past is generally referred to as the 'Big Bang' or the 'birth' of the Universe some 13.7 billion years ago. 'Cosmic Microwave Background' is supposed to be the signature or echo left behind by the Big Bang. Therefore, the cosmic microwave background is considered as scientific evidence to prove this theory. The name 'Big Bang' was actually given by Fred Hoyle in 1949 in a pejorative sense while propounding his own theory of 'Steady State' which was rejected in 1964 with the discovery of cosmic microwave background supporting the Big Bang theory. With the passage of time the Universe continued to grow in size leading to a gradual decline in temperature with the typical energy of each particle decreasing. Billions of years later the particle energy dropped to a level which can be obtained in particle physics making scientific measurements possible.

Similar explanations have been provided by the National Aeronautical Space Administration of the United States. According to NASA the Universe was created sometime between 12 and 14 billion years ago from a cosmic explosion that hurled matter in all directions. This concept has also been defined as, 'the explosion from zero volume at zero time of a corpuscle of energy equivalent to the mass and radiation that now constitutes the Universe'. This state of zero volume at zero time is also known as the 'singularity'. According to this theory, initially the Universe was so dense and hot that it was not governed by the laws of physics as we see them today. Even the elementary particles like protons and neutrons could not exist. Instead, all types of matter collided creating pure energy. When the cooling process began, protons and neutrons were formed. Slowly, over time these protons, neutrons and electrons came together to form Hydrogen and Helium. Over a period of billions of years the planets, the stars, the galaxies, and the inter-galactic spaces were created forming the Universe as we see it today. Thereafter, the right combination of millions of natural phenomena emerged over time to create the conditions for life to exist. Let me cite a few of these natural forces that govern these conditions; the emergence of stars and planets and their rotation, the speed of such rotations and revolution, the gravitational force of matter, the reduction in temperatures from excessively hot to moderate, the qualities of light and heat of the sun, the speed of sun rays, the velocity of winds, emergence of water, the fertility of earth and the qualities of ether to name but a few. In addition, we all know that even the slightest change in these combinations could endanger the very existence of life. Even a 2% rise in temperatures on the earth could force glaciers to melt, lakes to dry up, the ocean level to rise and thousands of islands to disappear, therefore, all in all threatening the very existence of life on earth. Imagine the occurrence of a slight change in the gravitational force of the earth or other planets in the solar system. This could even make them collide against each other creating havoc in the solar system. Therefore the fine tuning of the combination of these natural forces is of vital importance for the right conditions for life to exist. Perhaps the most astonishing of all is how the right combination of millions of such factors emerged and is being constantly maintained. A miracle that remains shrouded in mystery.

Hubble's Law

Scientists believe that the Universe is still expanding. Edwin Hubble carried out observations into deep space from Mount Wilson Observatory for over a decade. Hubble's Law (Galactic Red Shifts) is the name given for his astronomical observations in the physical cosmos. All the objects observed in deep space were found to be shifting away from the earth. Based on these observations Edwin Hubble announced in 1929 that almost all the galaxies appeared to be moving away or receding from us. This phenomenon was coined as the 'red shift' of a galaxy's spectrum. This red shift appeared to have a larger displacement for faint presumably further galaxies. Hence, the farther a galaxy, the faster it is believed to be receding from earth. Based on these observations he developed a constant popularly known as the 'Hubble Constant'. On the basis of these experiments it

was also concluded that the Universe is still expanding and is expanding at an increasingly faster rate. The ever increasing distance of stars from the earth also known as red-shift is supposed to support the scientific explanation that the Universe is still expanding. As stated earlier, this fact has been reconfirmed by the three scientists who were awarded a Nobel Prize in physics in 2011 for the observation of light emitted by 50 distant supernovae or cosmic lighthouses. Their experiments also suggest that there are parts of universe where light has never reached or would never reach. These parts known as dark energy and black holes are therefore beyond the reach of observations even by the most powerful telescopes. When and how they will come within the range of observation and what such observation would reveal is a matter of pure speculation.

Modern Science

If we look at these scientific theories closely we will discover that they raise more questions than they answer. Firstly the scientists themselves agree that the Big Bang defies all the laws of physics and hence cannot be explained scientifically. Secondly, there is nothing that could even remotely substantiate the occurrences at the initial stages of the Big Bang when the so called corpuscle of high energy might have exploded. Hence these are simply conjectures. Thirdly, there is no direct correlation between the Cosmic Microwave Background and the Big Bang. This is a mere conjecture as well. Fourthly, and most importantly, these theories provide no explanations as to how the original high energy corpuscle was formed or the source of this energy. All these theories pre-suppose that something existed before the Big Bang in some form which exploded and expanded or evolved gradually. However, there is absolutely no explanation for the stuff the Universe is made of and how this stuff originated in the first place. Since nothing can be created out of nothing, how could the Universe be created out of nothing? This is the core issue. Modern science has no answer to this riddle. Fifthly, how the right combination of millions of natural forces emerged to create conditions for life to evolve remains completely unknown. Finally, what about those vast spaces (96%) in the Universe which are called dark energy and black holes; should they be ignored? Thus, these theories explain nothing but the most obvious and routinely observable aspects of our daily existence. This is similar to the sprouting of a large Banyan tree from a very small seed or birth of a child from a miniscule particle of human sperm or a huge devastating fire from a tiny spark. The only difference between these examples and the Big Bang theory is the scale of happenings. The principle is the same, i.e. these are mere manifestations of that which is non-manifest. However, they do not answer the questions of how the first seed, the first being or a spark of fire initially came into existence. Similarly, the Big Bang fails to explain the origin of the so called corpuscle of energy that led to a massive explosion hurling the material in all directions. Moreover, how the right conditions with proper fine tuning of millions of natural phenomena came into existence for life to evolve remains a subject of speculation. Therefore these theories throw little light on the origin of the Universe.

Vedic Wisdom

Now let us look at the ancient Vedic wisdom on this core issue of our existence. To begin with, ancient Indian sages did not make any attempt either to measure the size of the Universe or to understand the precise functioning of trillions of its constituents. They did not want to get lost in the labyrinth of details as they knew that this physical route was impossible to follow and was utterly unreliable in its outcome. They therefore chose to demystify the seed itself rather than to concentrate on numerous branches, leaves, flowers and fruits as they are nothing but mere manifestation of the seed in different forms. They also knew that understanding the properties of one single spark of fire was good enough to understand millions of different manifestations of fire. Moreover, they were fully aware of the serious limitations of the human senses and intellect through understanding of the 'Self'. They knew that human senses are not reliable enough as they are subject to perpetual deception due to a constant interplay of a variety of external factors. For example, mere change in sunlight, velocity of wind, movement of clouds and rainfall could change

the observation and perception of reality dramatically. Since a disproportionately large part of the Universe exists in the form of dark spaces/black holes beyond human observation, how could that be perceived through senses and physical instruments? Taking all these factors into account, Indian sages in ancient times had deliberated and meditated on this important question for centuries. They took a holistic view of the Universe and the underlying causes to understand its mysteries and provided a logical and lucid explanation to the origin of the Universe. Their writings based on these discoveries spread over a period of several thousand years are enshrined in the ancient Indian writings popularly known as Vedic writings. The Upanishads, the Bhagvad Gita, the Puranas and the Brahman Sutras provide a vivid account of the ancient Indian wisdom addressed to find answers to these basic issues of creation. Let us have a brief look at these writings to find answers to the riddles of creation.

Brahman

The Vedic literature equates the Universe with the Brahman. The word has been derived from the Sanskrit root 'brih' which means 'to grow great, to enlarge or to spread like a net'. Hence Brahman literally means; the one who has the capacity or the power to grow infinitely without any limitations. According to the Taittiriyopanishad, whatever reality is in existence, by which all the rest subsists is Brahman. He is an eternal behind all instabilities and a constant which supports all mutations. He is hidden in all appearances and forms. Although I have used the word He, Brahman has no gender. He is neither male nor female. Since He is hidden in all appearances and forms, He is male in a male, female in a female, child in a child, bird in a bird and animal in an animal. In this sense Brahman is akin to space which turns into a house, a playground, a shopping mall, a factory, a theatre or a stadium depending on the structure and use. Space exists in all these forms as well as outside of these forms. Similarly, Brahman exists in all forms and appearances as well as outside of them. Hence Brahman is the only reality behind the ever changing universal manifestation and has been described as eternal, unborn (self-generated), most subtle with no attributes, and everlasting with no origin, no middle and no end. Since Brahman has no attributes, He has no form. He is omnipresent yet most subtle. He is beyond the grasp of senses and intellect. As He is self-generated; He can neither be created nor destroyed. He is the smallest of the small and hence beyond sense perception, He is also the largest of the large and hence infinite. He is static but moves faster than the fastest. As the spider sends forth and spreads its web and then withdraws it back, all manifestations emanate from Him and then dissolve back into Him. Since He is the only source of all creation and seed of all seeds, everything rests in Him. Simultaneously, He rests in everything; moving or non-moving, conscious or non-conscious for He is the only cause of creation. Whatever we see in this universe is a mere manifestation of the invisible Brahman into the visible universe. Hence according to these writings the Universe is nothing but a mere manifestation of Brahman. When the visible manifestation is annihilated it returns to the invisible Brahman. Everything in this universe rests upon Brahman as the pearls in a necklace are strung on a thread. Like thousands of sparks appear from fire and dissolve back to fire, like a large variety of plants and herbs originate from earth and then they dissolve back to earth and like millions of hair appear on the head and the body and then they return back to their origin, everything in this universe appears from the Brahman and returns back to Him. The one Being of whom all existences are Becoming. In the Ishopanishad, the oldest of all Upanishads, Brahman self-extended in time and space has been defined as the Universe.