



# The Artisan's Universe: Philosophical Cosmology in Indian Crafts

Satyabrata Panigrahy

## Abstract

This article explores the profound parallels between ancient Indian crafts and cosmological concepts through metaphorical interpretations. Drawing inspiration from Indian philosophy and traditions, it examines how everyday crafts symbolize complex cosmic principles like cycle of time, space-time fabric, interconnectedness, fine-tuning, and the Big Bang model. The potter's wheel illustrates the cyclic nature of the universe; the weaver's loom and Indra's Net reflect the intricate web of interdependence; culinary traditions echo the universe's fine-tuned balance; and the blacksmith's forge symbolises the oscillating cosmos. These metaphors bridge ancient wisdom with contemporary understanding. Through these symbolic narratives, the article suggests that cosmology is not only a scientific pursuit but also a deeply philosophical and artistic exploration with a sense of aesthetics. Ultimately, it demonstrates how metaphor serves as a powerful cognitive tool to grasp the complexities of the cosmos and human existence.

**Keywords:** *Cosmology, Philosophy, Fine-tuning, Cycles of time, Big Bang, Metaphors, Craftsmanship, Aesthetics.*

## Introduction

Nobel laureate physicist Franz Wilczek has asked a thought-provoking question in his book "A Beautiful question: finding nature's deep design"— "Is the world a work of art?". Indian philosophy says a big 'Yes'. Every craft is associated with some centuries-old traditions, legends, philosophies, and some cosmic connections hidden in it. It plays a pivotal role in defining the history of a nation. According to Indian philosophy and metaphysics, the whole universe is an epitome of alluring art and craft, and the intelligent designer of this vast universe is the greatest craftsman. He is Vishwakarma, the architect of this universe, the painter of this world map. Man is imitating that elegant craftsmanship present throughout the cosmos. In Indian philosophy, the potter's wheel is revered as a symbol of the cosmic cycle—creation, destruction, and the eternal rhythms of nature. This profound metaphor inspires to delve deeper into ancient literature and craft traditions, exploring other symbolic expressions of cosmic concepts woven into the fabric of our artistic heritage. In a unique way of using metaphors, the philosophy of cosmology can be understood through these ancient crafts.



## Potter and the Wheel of cosmos

The potter makes beautiful earthen pots, moulding clay with his expert hands. 17th century Indian poet Dinakrishna Das narrates the legend of the Potter community in his book “Kurala Purana”. The importance of the theory of cyclic universe is reflected in the “Kurala Panchami” festival of their culture. In Odisha’s Puri city, the potters worship their pottery wheel during this festival. This wheel represents the cyclic model of cosmology. Ever since the big bang, the universe has been expanding and cooling down. Eventually, the whole universe will end in a state of dissolution, either through heat death or a big crunch. The potter’s wheel becomes a metaphor of the wheel of time, where the end is the beginning. This non-linear cycle exists in every corner of this elegant cosmos. The flow of energy in nature is cyclic. The energy flows from high temperature to low temperature, electric current flows from high potential to low potential, air flows from high pressure to low pressure to maintain equilibrium. Again, the state of equilibrium is disturbed and the flow of energy continues. The whole cosmos is nothing, but a sacrificial cyclic flow of energy. Seed comes from a tree and again from the seed, a new plant grows. Stars, planets, etc. are originated from a nebula, and will go back to that state of nebula at the end. Many civilizations started from the banks of the river and ended again through the devastating effects of that river through floods, cyclones, change of direction etc... The cycle of creation ends where it starts. This shows the cosmic cycle of creation in action. Different cycles are observed in nature, like the cycle of seasons, water cycle, nutrient cycle, oxygen cycle, carbon cycle, waste recycle. The menstrual cycle in a female body gives birth to a new life. The rotation of planets around the Sun and the rotation of electrons around the nucleus are also some examples of cyclic process.

The wheel is also a symbol of mobility. The wheel is used in everything from power generation to transportation to weaving clothes. In this context, MK Gandhi once wrote in the young India magazine, “India’s progress has been hampered by the closure of wheels and charkhas. Once again, we have to turn the wheel and make indigenous clothes and become self-reliant.” This wheel is an indicator of poverty alleviation in India.

## Weaving the web of universe

In the Vedic metaphysics, the whole cosmos is likened to the weaving of fabric by a skilled weaver. Spider’s web is used here as a metaphor to explain cosmology. This universe is also like a giant space-time fabric in which all beings are interconnected. That’s why everything in this universe is relative and all the elements are dependent on each other. There exists a mutual relationship between them. It is called tantra in Vedic philosophy, which means “weaving like a net”, just as a weaver weaves a piece of cloth. Similarly, the Buddhist concept of Indra’s Net is a profound metaphor illustrating the interconnectedness of all phenomena. Imagined as an infinite



net with a jewel at each node, where every jewel reflects all others, it symbolizes the idea that every part of the universe is intimately linked with every other part. In cosmology, Indra's Net resonates with the understanding that the universe is a dynamic, interdependent whole, where no entity exists in isolation. The metaphor's earliest reference is found in the Atharva Veda. This ancient concept aligns with modern systems thinking and quantum interconnectedness, offering a holistic vision of reality. The interconnectedness of all existing entities also becomes an integral part of "deep ecology", as explained by physicist Fritjof Capra in his book "The web of life". Cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter, in his book "Godel, Escher, Bach", has used Indra's net as a metaphor for the complex intertwined networks of objects in a system.

## The Master Chef of the Universe

Cooking is an art, which requires a different set of skills and experimentation techniques for preparing new dishes. Indian epics also contains many stories and anecdotes related to the chef tradition. King Nala, described in the Mahabharata, was an expert chef and had written the sanskrit text "Paka Darpana" on the art and craft of cooking. The most important formula of cooking is that the right proportion and mixture of ingredients gives a fine taste. In the same way, the systematic and harmonic design of this universe and the origin of life requires a particular ratio of combination of different organic and inorganic elements. It is called "fine tuning" in modern physics, without which the design of the universe can be different. The fine-tuning of the cosmos refers to the precise conditions that make life possible in the universe. Fundamental physical constants—such as the strength of gravity, the charge of the electron, and the rate of cosmic expansion—appear to be set at exact values that, if altered even slightly, would render the universe lifeless. This remarkable precision has led scientists and philosophers alike to ponder upon whether it is a result of chance, coincidence, necessity, or an intelligent design of creator.

## Blacksmith igniting the big bang

A blacksmith makes various household appliances by banging and moulding hot iron pieces. Rig Veda, one of the oldest texts, also mentions blacksmith's furnace as a metaphor to explain creation of the universe. Just as a blacksmith blows wind through the repeated expansion and contraction of the bellow to ignite fire, so this oscillating universe is going through continuous expansion and contraction, while the black furnace represents the super-heated big bang condition. The Big Bang theory of modern physics says that the world we see is constantly expanding and may possibly shrink in a big crunch.



## Conclusion

On the significance of metaphors in our lives, American writer Mary Catherine says, “The human species thinks in metaphors and learn through stories.” This insight beautifully captures how deeply metaphors shape our understanding. In a unique way, the philosophical cosmology can be understood through these ancient crafts. Far beyond mere figures of speech, metaphors serve as cognitive bridges that connect abstract concepts to tangible experiences, allowing us to grasp the complexities of life, existence, and the cosmos. Throughout history, metaphors have not only enriched language and literature but have also been fundamental in framing philosophical and scientific inquiry. In this light, philosophical cosmology—a field that seeks to explore the origins and structure of the universe—can be meaningfully apprehended through metaphorical narratives and symbolic expressions.

## Reference

1. Capra, Fritjof. The web of life: a new scientific understanding of living systems. Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1996.
2. Wilczek, Frank. A beautiful question: finding nature’s deep design. Penguin press, 2015.
3. Capra, Fritjof. The Tao of Physics: an exploration of the parallels between modern physics and eastern mysticism. Shambala Publications, United states, 1975.
4. Malhotra, Rajiv. Indra’s Net: Defending Hinduism’s philosophical unity. HarperCollins, 2014.
5. Hofstadter, Douglas. Godel, Escher, Bach: an eternal golden braid. Basic books, United States, 1979.
6. Swami Vivekananda. The science and philosophy of religion. Advaita Ashrama, 1995.
7. Aguirre, Anthony. Cosmological koans: a journey to the heart of physical reality. Penguin Press, 2020.