

Introduction

A sense of futility about everything in the universe, including my own existence, has paralyzed me throughout my life. For instance, I see no reason at all for me to have been born. None.

I used to ask my mother Snehlata, admittedly to her chagrin and amusement both, why she and my father Manharay did not stop at the second child. (I am the youngest of the four). What answer can a mother possibly give her son who asks why she gave birth to him?

On balance and as I push 60, I am aware that I have brought nothing of value to the human discourse. Nothing. Yet I feel prompted to write this book.

It may seem as if through this book, I am seeking some identifiable purpose to the universe, but the truth is that I am not. Since the age of 13, when I started being drawn to the themes addressed here, I have never thought of the universe in terms of meaning or purpose. Just as I am most likely here, the universe is most likely here too and that's that. Until one of us ceases that will be that.

Strangely, with advancing years I feel an increasing measure of intellectual gnawing because of existential questions. One such question, invariably raised in my mind in Hindi "Yaar, yeh Jupiter karta kya hai?" (Dude, what does Jupiter really do?) partly explains this slight shift in my approach. Notwithstanding that there is no right or wrong answer as to the meaning or purpose of the universe, one has begun to ask it more assertively than at any stage in my life so far. There is no expectation of finding the answer that might satisfy me and that captures everything, from the infinitesimal to the infinite. There is, however, the expectation of deriving some joy from the quick endeavor of writing at whim.

Consider this book a writer's cut since I am also its editor and designer. I answer to myself about how I write, what I write, how long I write and why I write, and the answer is yes. You will discover quickly that it has no clear narrative structure. It leaps from theme to theme like Tarzan on vines; I may occasionally fall between two trees when I miss a vine or one of them snaps but I will not remain on the same tree.

Although my bachelor's degree is in chemistry and physics, I regard my level of comprehension of either at less than elementary level. I have moments of great clarity, but they disappear almost as soon as they appear. For quite some time in my late teens, I was under the delusion that I had some measure of physics generally and quantum physics particularly. As I grew older that delusion began to diminish rather rapidly. By the time I was 20 I had concluded that quantum physics was not a career option for me. With some flair for writing and telling a story, I chose journalism instead. Now I employ that skill to try and make some sense out of a whole host of profoundly complex themes that abound across the universe.

--Mayank Chhaya