

VOYAGER MISSION AND VOICE OF INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

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NASA launched Voyager 1 and 2 in 1977 to explore interstellar space extending its original mission to study outer planets. Apart from numerous instruments for scientific study, the spacecrafts carried a golden record containing pictures, sounds and music from different regions of the earth with the hope that in the event of the spaceship encountering a civilization in any distant stellar system, its intelligent beings would come to know about us. Many of us may not be aware that a piece of Indian classical music finds a proud place in the selection of 27 musical items from various parts of the world. It is a song rendered by Surashri Kesarbai Kerkar of Atrauli-Jaipur Gharana.

Centuries ago, man thought he was at the centre of the ‘universe’ that was limited to what he could observe around him and up in the sky. Gradually, as scientific ideas about locations of the Sun, the planets, the stars and their relative distances evolved, he realized that his earth was only a tiny speck in the vast expanse of the universe of innumerable galaxies and stars. As it dawned

on him that there were millions of stars like the Sun his ancestors once worshipped, he started thinking whether there were other stellar systems like the solar system and other ‘civilizations’ like his own. Just as one looks for like-minded companions in one’s neighbourhood, mankind as a whole wondered whether he was alone in this vast unfathomable universe or there were other intelligent beings flourishing somewhere out there! From another point of view, there was the apprehension that if ever planet Earth were to get destroyed in some catastrophic event, some memory of it should be saved.

Thoughts like these prompted NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) of USA to plan sending of unmanned spacecrafts to explore the solar system beyond the neighborhood of the outer planets to the outer limits of the Sun’s sphere of influence, and possibly even beyond that. It started with launching of Pioneer-10 and 11 in early seventies followed by spacecrafts (appropriately named) Voyager 1 and 2 in quick succession in 1977. As a matter of fact, launch of Voyager 2 preceded that of Voyager 1. They were launched in to take advantage of a favorable alignment of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune (Fig. 2) and are now exploring the outer boundary of the heliosphere (the region of influence of the Sun) in interstellar space. The twin Voyager 1 and 2 spacecraft are exploring where nothing from Earth has flown before. Continuing on their 40 year journey since their 1977 launches, both of them are much farther away

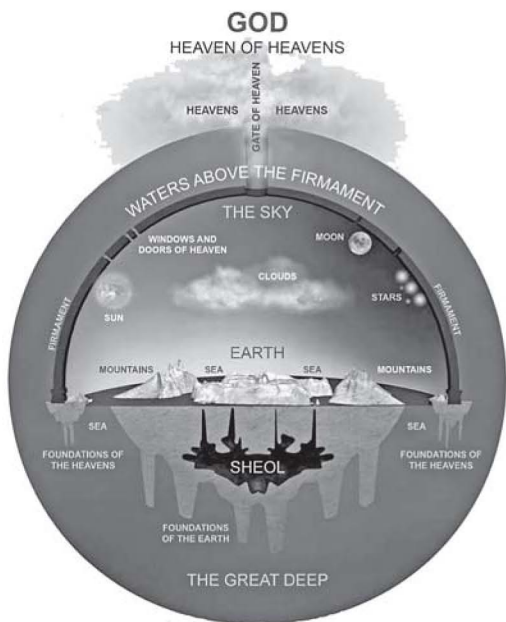


Fig. 1: The belief that Earth was the centre of the ‘Universe’

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