

Indian Astrology

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Astrology is best defined as “the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth, and the tradition that has thus been generated.”¹ India is home to a living tradition of astrology which extends back in an unbroken lineage for almost two thousand years, has roots which may be traced to the first or second millennia BCE, and has deep roots in Indian religion.² In India astrology is known as *jyotiṣa* or *jyotiḥśāstra* (“science of the stars”); this branch of learning includes mathematics, astronomy, divination, and astrology.³ As each branch became more sophisticated, each became a separate area of study, and while astronomers and mathematicians no longer utilize astrology in their area of study, astrologers still use mathematics and astronomy. The term *jyotiṣa* today is mostly used in connection with some sort of divinatory practice, and covers a range of subsets including *jātaka* (horoscopy, or astrology of the fate of the individual), *praśnaśāstra* (interrogational astrology), and *muhūrtaśāstra* (electing the right moment). Although Hellenistic, Arabic, and Western astrological techniques have been added over the course of the last two millennia, the ritual of consulting an astrologer for advice on love, profession, health, money, etc., or parents seeking guidance from an astrologer when their child is born, has never wavered.

We may ask whether astrology has a single, underlying rationale. Stephen Kemper’s discussion of astrology in Sri Lanka contains a discussion of time as an organising principle for astrological signs and the concept of the individual.⁴ In this sense, people and planets are connected because they behave in similar ways at the same time. But we may also question whether astrology exists as a single practice. Caterina Guenzi writes of the notion of

1 Patrick Curry, “Astrology”, in *The Encyclopaedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, Vol. 1, ed. Kelly Boyd (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), 55.

2 Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World’s Religions* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 110–134.

3 David Pingree, “The Logic of Non-Western Science: Mathematical Discoveries in Medieval India,” *Daedalus* 132, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 45–53.

4 Steven Kemper, “Time, Person, and Gender in Sinhalese Astrology,” *American Ethnologist* 7, no. 4 (Nov. 1980): 744–758.

bhāgya (fortune), which is central to astrology, as occupying a semantic field.⁵ It could equally be said that astrology itself occupies a semantic field, in which networks of ideas and practices are united by the common assumption of intimate, symbolic connections between all terrestrial life and the celestial bodies. In that the entire cosmos encompasses both the terrestrial and celestial then, as Audrius Beinorius concluded, astrology was divine both in its origins and status.⁶

History and Development

Astrology, as broadly defined by Patrick Curry, appears to be a universal feature of human culture. Jayaraman comments that “it is part of every society in one form or the other.”⁷ The earliest literary sources for an embryonic Indian astrology are the four sacred texts of the Vedas, the oldest of which (Rgveda) appears to date from the late second millennium BCE, perhaps around 1200 BCE, although with possible earlier roots in oral tradition. The Vedas included rules for the timing of sacred rituals, usually according to the positions of the sun and moon.⁸ The text is more concerned with reverence for the sun, fascination with the numbers seven and twelve (planets and months, respectively) and with 360—the number of days in an ideal year—and 720, than with astronomical detail or astrological rules.⁹ For example, the Rgveda reports that,

5 Caterina Guenzi, “The Allotted Share. Managing Fortune in Astrological Counselling in Banaras,” in *Cosmologies of Fortune: Luck, Vitality and the Contingency of Daily Life*, ed. G. Da Col et C. Humphrey, Special Issue of *Social Analysis*, 56, Issues no. 1&2 (2012): 39–55. See also R.S. Perinbanayagam, *The Karmic Theater: Self, Society and Astrology in Jaffna* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982). Joseph Damrell, review of *The Karmic Theater: Self, Society and Astrology in Jaffna* by R.S. Perinbanayagam, *Contemporary Sociology* 12, no. 5 (Sep. 1983): 577–578.

6 Audrius Beinorius, “Transformations of the Social and Religious Status of Indian Astrologers at the Royal Court,” in *Astrology in Time and Place: Cross Cultural Currents in the History of Astrology*, ed. Nicholas Campion and Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), forthcoming.

7 T. Jayaraman, “Vedic Astrology and All That,” *Frontline* 25 May 2001, 117.

8 Kim Plofker and Toke L. Knudsen, “Calendars in India,” in *Calendars and Years 11: Astronomy and Time in the Ancient and Medieval World*, ed. John M. Steele (Oxford: Oxbow Books 2011), 54.

9 Richard L. Thompson, *Vedic Cosmography and Astronomy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Ltd., 2004).

“Seven horses draw the seven who ride on the seven wheeled chariot,” while the “twelve-spoked wheel of Order rolls around the sky and never ages.”¹⁰

There is no practical, interpretative astrology in the Vedas, with the exception of *nakṣatra* lists accompanied by actions to be performed when the moon occupies each one.¹¹ Often translated as “lunar mansions,” the *nakṣatras* marked the path of the moon in its 27.3 day sojourn through the fixed stars along the ecliptic; they are believed to have been established as the basis of the early lunar calendars around 2240–1760 BCE.¹² However, since the 1980s, many Western practitioners of Indian astrology have adopted its branding as ‘Vedic’ from popular Indian teachers.¹³ Indian astrology may be described as relational, in the sense that all parts of the cosmos may be understood by their relationships with all other parts. Central to this notion is the concept of the archetypal Man, the cosmic giant *Puruṣa*, who, it is said, “has a thousand eyes, a thousand feet (and) pervaded the earth on all sides and extended beyond it as far as ten fingers”.¹⁴ The text continues in a cosmological vein:

The moon was born from his mind; from his eye the sun was born . . . From his navel the middle realm of space arose; from his head the sky evolved. From his two feet came the earth, and the quarters of the sky from his ear. Thus they (the gods) set the world in order.¹⁵

10 K.V. Sarma (trans.) and with notes by T.S.K. Sastry, *Vedāṅga Jyotiṣa of Lagadha* (New Delhi: Indian National Science Academy, 1985). Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, trans., *The Rig Veda: An Anthology* (London: Penguin, 1981), 11.

11 These lists were made up of either 27 or 28 *nakṣatras*; in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* of the *Yajur Veda* (1v.4.10) and in the *Nakṣatra Kalpa* of the *Atharvaveda*, the *nakṣatras* were listed accompanied by presiding deities, parts of the day, directions, and rituals pertaining to them. See K.V. Sarma, “A Survey of Source Materials”, in *History of Astronomy in India*, ed. S.N. Sen and K.S. Sjukla (New Delhi: Indian National Science Academy, 2000), 4.

12 See Asko Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus Script* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 204.

13 One such teacher who promulgated the term ‘Vedic Astrology’ was Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, founder of Transcendental Meditation, who came to the west and garnered a large following. See Aurora Mackey, “Rx: A Mantra A Day,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 1992. See also T.N. Dharmadhikari, “Nakshatras and Vedic Astrology,” in *Issues in Vedic Astronomy and Astrology*, ed. Haribhai Pandya, Somdutt Dikshit and N.M. Kansara (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1992), 249–253.

14 O’Flaherty (trans.), *The Rig Veda*, 10.90.1, 30.

15 *Ibid.*, 10.90.13–14, and 31.

The notion of cosmic relationality inherited from the Vedas is central to Indian astrology (as to astrology in other cultures). Human destiny, indeed all terrestrial affairs, can be judged according to the relationship between the individual and the celestial bodies, as defined by the relationship between time and place, and the relationship of stars and planets to each other.

The Introduction of Hellenistic Astrology

Contact between Indian astronomers/astrologers and those in Mesopotamia is evident from perhaps the early first millennium BCE, with a possible two-way flow of ideas.¹⁶ The earliest extant Indian astrological text is the *Vedāṅga Jyotiṣa* of Lagadha, which is dated to anywhere between the late second and mid-first millennia BCE.¹⁷ The text is primarily calendrical and concerned with ascertaining the correct date and time for appropriate actions, mainly on the basis of solar and lunar positions.¹⁸ Since precise timing was necessary for adherence to Vedic rituals, *jyotiṣa*, along with *śikṣā* (phonetics), *vyākaraṇa* (grammar), *chandas* (meter), *nirukta* (etymology), and *kalpa* (performance of rituals), comprised the six *vedāṅgas*: the adjunct branches of the Vedas that were necessary tools for understanding and following the Vedic texts. If it were not for the fact that the heavenly bodies were used to time Vedic rituals, then *jyotiṣa* might not have been classified as a *vedāṅga*, and might not have garnered its respected place in Vedic tradition.

Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna, a Buddhist text dating from around the first century CE, is the earliest extant Sanskrit text that delineates characteristics and fate of the individual based on the position of the *janmanakṣatra*—the *nakṣatra* occupied by the moon at the moment of birth—even though each delineation only consists of one or two attributes per *nakṣatra*.¹⁹ The complex interpretative astrology associated with the horoscope (a schematic map of the heavens

16 David Pingree, 'Venus Omens in India and Babylon', in *Language, Literature and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner*, ed. Francesca Rochberg-Halton (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1987), 293–315.

17 Kim Plofker, *Mathematics in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 39.

18 Lagadha. *Vedāṅga Jyotiṣa* (New Delhi: Indian National Science Academy, 1984).

19 Sujitkumar Mukhopadhyāya, ed., *The Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna* (Calcutta: Viśva-Bharati Santiniketan, 1954), 61.

drawn for a particular place, date and time) was introduced from the Hellenistic world via Persia probably in the second and third centuries CE. There is some resistance to this version of history on the grounds that it represents a form of colonialism. However, this is to project modern national boundaries anachronistically onto a past in which they did not exist. The horoscopic astrology was a synthesis of ideas and practices borrowed from Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt and Greece.²⁰ Additionally concepts of the transmigration of souls and a complex view of fate based on the paradoxical interplay of free choice and a predetermined future were as well known in Hellenistic culture as much as in India, quite possibly due to the prior westward movement of Hindu and Buddhist cosmology.²¹

The earliest extant Sanskrit text on horoscopy is the *Yavanajātaka* ("Greek horoscopy") of *Sphujidhvaja*, a third-century metric version of a second-century work probably written in Alexandria and translated by Yavaneśvara ("Lord of the Greeks").²² Despite missing fragments, David Pingree compiled, translated into English, and completely annotated the manuscript, transforming *Yavanajātaka* into a readable text that showed how Hellenistic concepts were combined with uniquely Indian ones. Most notable was its introduction of the use of the zodiac, a division of the ecliptic into *rāśis* (twelve equal divisions of stars, or zodiacal signs) of thirty degrees each as follows:²³

20 Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology 1: The Ancient World* (London: Continuum, 2009).

21 A.N. Marlow, "Hinduism and Buddhism in Greek Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 4, no. 1 (Apr 1954): 35–45.

22 David Pingree, ed. and trans., *The Yavanajātaka of Sphujidhvaja, vol. 1 and 2* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1978). Most recently there has been a reassessment of the dating and origin of *Yavanajātaka* based on a translation of a resurfaced manuscript. See Bill M. Mak, "The Last Chapter of Sphujidhvaja's *Yavanajātaka* Critically Edited with Notes," *SCIAMVS: Source and Commentaries in Exact Science*, vol. 14 (Dec., 2013): 59–148. See also, Idem, "The Date and Nature of Sphujidhvaja's *Yavanajātaka* Reconsidered in the Light of Some Newly Discovered Materials," *History of Science in South Asia* 1 (2013): 1–20.

23 The signs are listed here according to their English zodiacal names followed by their Sanskrit names, and the meaning of the Sanskrit term. They are often listed in astrology texts by their number. For instance, Gemini, most often called *mithuna*, is also called *trītiya*, the third. See Pingree, *Yavanajātaka*, vol. 2, 11.

TABLE 8.1 *The signs of the zodiac in english and their sanskrit equivalents*

1.	Aries	<i>Meṣa</i>	(Ram)
2.	Taurus	<i>Vṛṣa</i>	(Bull)
3.	Gemini	<i>Mithuna</i>	(Couple)
4.	Cancer	<i>Kulīra</i>	(Crab)
5.	Leo	<i>Siṃha</i>	(Lion)
6.	Virgo	<i>Kanyā</i>	(Maiden)
7.	Libra	<i>Tulā</i>	(Scales)
8.	Scorpio	<i>Vṛścika</i>	(Scorpion)
9.	Sagittarius	<i>Dhanu</i>	(Archer)
10.	Capricorn	<i>Makara</i>	(Crocodile with Deer Head)
11.	Aquarius	<i>Kumbha</i>	(Water Pot)
12.	Pisces	<i>Mīna</i>	(Fish)

Indian astrologers, then as now, utilize the sidereal (*nirayana*) zodiac, which maintains a fixed relationship with the stars over time, unlike the seasonal, or tropical (*sāyana*) zodiac, which maintains a fixed relationship with the Vernal Equinoctial Point. The difference between the two zodiacs at any given moment is defined by the *āyanāṃśa*, the difference in degrees and minutes between sidereal 0° Aries and the point at which the equinox actually occurs. Since the earth's rotational axis moves in a retrograde "precessional" motion, the Vernal Equinox never quite returns to the same place in relation to the stars, moving backward in relation to the celestial sphere at approximately 50.23" per year, thus retrogressing one degree in about 71.67 years.²⁴

The zodiacal signs were used as the primary backdrop for the *grahas* ("seizers," and the term for "planets"), which in the third century CE amounted

24 The official Lahiri *āyanāṃśa*, which is used in government publications, is presently 24° 4', meaning that the Vernal Equinox is located at around 5° Pisces 56'. Precession and, therefore, the sidereal zodiac, were not used consistently in India during the first millennium CE. The rate of precession was recorded in some texts during the first millennium CE, yet rejected by several respected astronomers. The astronomer Muñjāla first used an *āyanāṃśa* of about 6° in his treatise *Laghumānasa* (932 CE), after which time the sidereal zodiac was implemented. See S.D. Sharma, "Eclipses, Parallax, and Precession of Equinoxes," in *History of Astronomy in India*, ed. S.N. Sen and K.S. Sjukla (New Delhi: Indian National Science Academy, 2000), 227.

to the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn.²⁵ They were not, though, consistently listed in that order, according to the days of the week they ruled, until the fourth century CE.²⁶ The following is a list of the planets, the zodiacal signs they own (*svakṣetra*), where they are exalted (*ucca*), where they are debilitated (*nīca*), the days of the week to which they correspond, and attributes.

The *rāśis* categorised everything from dwelling places to body parts to vocation to compass directions. The *grahas* represented attributes, the senses, parts of the body, and even the people in your life. For instance, Sun is father; Moon, mother; Mars, brother; Mercury, relatives; Jupiter, children; Venus, wife;

TABLE 8.2 *The planets related to the zodiac signs, days of the week and qualities*

English	Sanskrit	Rulership	Exaltation	Debilitation	Days	Selected Qualities
Sun	<i>Sūrya</i>	Leo	Aries	Libra	Sunday	power, vigor
Moon	<i>Candra</i>	Cancer	Taurus	Scorpio	Monday	maternal, mind
Mars	<i>Kuja</i>	Aries, Scorpio	Capricorn	Cancer	Tuesday	strength, courage
Mercury	<i>Budha</i>	Gemini, Virgo	Virgo	Pisces	Wednesday	speech, learning
Jupiter	<i>Guru</i>	Sagittarius, Pisces	Cancer	Capricorn	Thursday	knowledge, wealth
Venus	<i>Śukra</i>	Taurus, Libra	Pisces	Virgo	Friday	love, happiness
Saturn	<i>Śani</i>	Capricorn, Aquarius	Libra	Aries	Saturday	sorrow, fear

²⁵ The *grahas* always include the Sun and Moon, even though they are not technically planets. They had many different appellations derived from their mythological meanings, physical characteristics, etc.

²⁶ See Michio Yano, "Planet Worship in Ancient India," in *Studies in the History of the Exact Sciences in Honour of David Pingree*, ed. Charles Burnett, Jan P. Hogendijk, Kim Plofker, and Michio Yano (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2004), 336–7.

Saturn, slave.²⁷ In the royal court, the Sun and Moon are king and queen; Mars, commander-in-chief; Mercury, prince; Venus and Jupiter, ministers; Saturn, servant.²⁸

The Sun is a fierce steadfast hero, a powerful leader . . . The Moon is wise, patient, and fond of courtesies . . . Venus is given over to a love of instrumental music, dancing, singing . . . Jupiter bears authority in decisions relating to the Vedic sciences, sacred learning, politics, law . . . Mercury has an unstable nature, taking on the characters of others . . . Mars is a hero, used to killing, taking and opposing; Saturn is strong, but his limbs are curved by the bending of the head . . .²⁹

Moon, Venus, and Jupiter are considered to be naturally benefic *grahas* that confer ease and blessings, while Sun, Mars, and Saturn are the natural malefics, or obstructive *grahas* that place obstacles that must be overcome. Mercury is neutral, and can be benefic or malefic, depending on its placement in the horoscope. If a *graha* is placed in the sign it owns or in which it is exalted, the planet would exhibit its most positive traits. Under this principal, Venus placed in Pisces at the moment of one's birth would cause one to exhibit immense compassion, since it represents love, while Mars in Capricorn would represent great athletic ability, since it rules physical action. By the same token, the spouse, since it is symbolized by Venus, will be a wonderful partner, while the siblings, ruled by Mars, will be very successful. On the other hand, if Mercury, which rules the mind and the relatives, is debilitated in Pisces, then the mind as well as the relatives would not serve the native well. These are simple ways in which a planet, and therefore the thing it represents, can gain strength or weakness. A simple way to look at this is to say that "A planet is blazing when he is in his exaltation . . . he is confident and healthy in his own sign . . . he is greatly afraid when he is in his debilitation."³⁰

Along with the zodiac and planets, the concept of the horoscope was introduced whereby the planets, positioned against the backdrop of the zodiacal signs and in relation to one another at the moment of birth, would be interpreted to portend the fate of the individual. The *rāśicakra* (horoscope) begins with the *lagna* ("point of contact or intersection")—the point that literally rises on, or intersects with, the eastern horizon (the point of sunrise) at the

27 Pingree, *Yavanajātaka*, vol. 2, 1:121, 10.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., vol. 2, 1:123–136, 10–11.

30 Mantresvara, *Phaladīpika*, trans. G.S. Kapoor (New Delhi: Ranjan Publications, 1996), 3:18–19, and 36.

moment of birth.³¹ The zodiacal sign in which that point falls, known in the west as the rising, or ascending, sign, encompasses the first *bhāva* (“state of being” which, in this context, means astrological house or place) of the horoscope, and the other *bhāvas* follow sequentially. Thus, if the *lagna rāśi*, or ascending sign, is Gemini, then Gemini would be considered the first house. Following that would be the sign of Cancer as the second house, Leo as the third house, etc., until the twelve houses encompass each of the twelve signs. The planets are then placed in the signs they occupy at the moment of birth, and the horoscope is thus constructed.

The houses or “states of being” were often, like the signs, named according to their number, e.g. first, second, third, etc., or the area of life they represented as follows:³²

TABLE 8.3 *The Bhāvas (houses) of the horoscope and their areas of life*

First House	<i>Tanu</i> —Body
Second House	<i>Artha</i> —Wealth
Third House	<i>Bhrātṛ</i> —Brothers (and sisters)
Fourth House	<i>Bandhu</i> —Relations
Fifth House	<i>Putra</i> —Sons (and daughters)
Sixth House	<i>Ari</i> —Enemy
Seventh House	<i>Kāma</i> —Desire
Eighth House	<i>Randhra</i> —Death
Ninth House	<i>Dharma</i> —Right Action
Tenth House	<i>Karma</i> —Work
Eleventh House	<i>Labha</i> —Gains
Twelfth House	<i>Vyaya</i> —Loss

31 There were different terms for zodiac, which is often written as *bhumaṇḍala*, or *bhucakra*, meaning circle of stars. The word horoscope is usually conveyed as *raśīcakra*, *raśīmaṇḍala* and *bhāvacakra*. These terms were often used interchangeably for horoscope and zodiac, although the two meanings are very different. Zodiac refers to constellations in the sky, generally speaking, whereas horoscope refers to the constellations at the moment of birth.

32 Like the planets and zodiacal signs, several different words are used for each house, which represent different concepts, including parts of the body. The third house, for example, also rules courage, the fourth house also rules home, and the fifth house also rules intelligence. See Varāhamihira, B. Suryanarain Rao, trans., *Brhajjātaka* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1986), 116, and 63.

The following example from a woman's astrological text shows how the benefic vs. malefic *grahas* influence the fifth house.

The fifth place sun produces a woman who has few children . . . The moon situated in the fifth place produces a woman who has good children . . . Mars situated in the fifth place creates a woman with bad children . . . Jupiter situated in the fifth place produces a woman who has well-behaved children . . .³³

The planets are further described, among other things, in terms of *yogas* ('joining')—special planetary combinations that yield specific results; *dr̥ṣṭi* ("seeing" or "knowing")—two or more planets that are juxtaposed in the chart, so that each influences, sees, and knows the other (equivalent to the 'aspects' in western astrology); and *daśās*—planetary periods into which the life is divided. Though much of *Yavanajātaka* was derived from Hellenistic sources, numerous topics like Indian flora and fauna, *āyurveda*, using *nakṣatras* for *yātrā* (military strategy), *daśās*, *praśnaśāstra*, and *muhūrtaśāstra* originated in India.³⁴ The addition of techniques, categorizations, and planetary worship that could only apply to Indian culture transformed *jyotiṣa* into a true Indian astrology. *Ṛddhayavanajātaka* (Great or Old Greek Horoscopy), the earliest extant Sanskrit text based solely on horoscopy (with the exception of the last eight chapters on omens), was composed around 300–325 CE³⁵ by Mīnarāja, an Indo-Greek overlord who likely came from the same social milieu as Sphujidhvaja and Yavaneśvara.³⁶ There is nothing on *yātra*, *praśnaśāstra*, or *muhūrtaśāstra*, all of which had been included in *Yavanajātaka*. *Ṛddhayavanajātaka* is, however, the first text in which *strījātaka* ("women's horoscopy") appeared, since there does not seem to be any record of Sanskrit texts predating this text that

33 David Pingree, ed., *Ṛddhayavanajātaka of Mīnarāja*, vol. 2 (Baroda: Oriental Institute. Gaekwad's Oriental Series, vol. 163, 1976), 61:5, 17, 29, and 53.

34 See David Pingree, *From Astral Omens to Astrology from Babylon to Bikaner* (Rome: Istituto Italiano Per L'Africa E L'Oriente, 1997), 36–37.

35 With the discovery of the new manuscript of *Yavanajātaka*, the dating of *Ṛddhayavanajātaka* may need to also be reassessed. See Bill M. Mak, "The 'Oldest Indo-Greek text in Sanskrit' Revisited—Additional Readings from the Newly Discovered Manuscript of the *Yavanajātaka*," *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 62, no. 3 (March 2014): 37–41.

36 David Pingree, ed., *Ṛddhayavanajātaka of Mīnarāja*, vol. 1 and 2 (Baroda: Oriental Institute. Gaekwad's Oriental Series, vol. 162 and 163, 1976). Pingree, *From Astral Omens to Astrology*, 36–37.

include material on this topic. This new genre, which addressed issues of marriage, children, beauty, and the importance of upholding Vedic traditions, continued to appear in all subsequent texts, though there were many variations.

It was also the first time since the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna* that the moon's *nakṣatra* was used for individual prognostication, with two chapters—one for men and one for women—devoted to delineating the qualities of the *nakṣatra* the moon occupies at birth. From this point forward, in all *jātaka* literature, the moon's *nakṣatras* would continue to be used both for the timing of activities and for the interpretation of the individual's destiny. Such is the case with Varāhamihira (505–587 CE), the great mathematician, astronomer, and astrologer who continued the “Indianisation” of Hellenistic horoscopy in *Brhājātaka* (“Great Horoscopy,” 550 CE).³⁷ The chapter describing the male and female qualities of the *nakṣatra* that the natal moon occupies became the primary marker for one's temperament and personality, in the same way that the zodiacal sign of the sun is used in the West. Even today, a Hindu priest will often ask the worshipper for his or her birth *nakṣatra* in order to give a blessing, or conduct certain *pūjās* (rituals), so this knowledge is extremely important. The relationship between *nakṣatras* of two charts is an important marker for compatibility in marriage, one of the many life events for which the *jyotiṣi* (astrologer) has always been called upon to determine the degree of auspiciousness.³⁸

Brhājātaka is considered by many to be the classic text on *jātaka*, from which all future texts emanated. Apart from techniques and emphases that vary due to regional, language, and cultural differences, or within families of astrologers who passed down techniques exclusively to their progeny, the horoscopy laid out by Varāhamihira (which incorporated Hellenistic and Indian techniques) influenced many astrological scriptures that followed over the next thousand years.³⁹

37 Varāhamihira is best known for his astronomical and mathematical text, *Pañcasiddhāntikā*, and what many consider to be his masterwork *Brhatsamhitā*, a text on the astrology of earthly phenomenon, meteorology, omens, gemstones, etc. He also authored *Laghujātaka*, an abridged version of *Brhājātaka*, *Brhadyātrā* on military astrology, and *Vivāhapaṭala*, a text on marriage.

38 Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 67.

39 Some of these include *Sārāvalī* by Kalyāṇavarman (around 800 CE), *Jātakakarmapaddhati* by Śrīpati (11th century), *Phaladīpikā* by Mantreśvara (16th century). See David Pingree, *Jyotiḥśāstra: Astral and Mathematical Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981), 88–89.

Jyotiṣa and the Vedic Tradition

The horoscope has always been used to portend the fate of the individual as he or she progresses through life, providing information about vitality, money, health, family, education, marriage, profession, illness, and death, and the astrologer has always served the Hindu community by elucidating and communicating this information. Astrologers have always advised kings and other members of the royal court and in *Brhatsaṃhitā* (“great collection”), Varāhamihira, a court astrologer himself, lays out the qualifications of an astrologer in an entire chapter. He distinguishes the knowledgeable astrologer who is schooled in mathematics and astronomy from those seers who make predictions for the sake of profit, and that a King would be a fool not to consult someone who is truly qualified.⁴⁰ With the emergence of horoscopy in the third and fourth centuries CE, consulting an astrologer became more common among the Brahmanic upper classes, but was also able to bridge the gap of caste through implementation of the horoscope. According to Pingree

The client who would consult an astrologer following the *Yavanajātaka* was evidently expected to be a member of the upper classes, a wealthy landowner or merchant, or one who had the possibility of becoming a government official or an army officer; lesser professions are mentioned infrequently and with opprobrium. Can one conclude, then, that, despite the (admittedly very scanty) epigraphic evidence, the leaders of society in the realm of the Western Kṣatrapas were predominantly Brāhmaṇas? I rather think so. But the Brāhmaṇa caste must have been open to wealthy and powerful members of other castes . . . even to Mlecchas.⁴¹

Although Pingree wrote this as part of his commentary on *Yavanajātaka*, there is little doubt that his assessment—that clients who frequented an astrologer in this community were probably Brahmans, but also included those of other castes, as well as foreigners (mlecchas)—would apply to any Brahmanic community. The techniques laid out in the texts reflected the emergence of a true Indian astrology. But the real “Indianization” of *jyotiṣa* can be seen through the merging of the horoscope’s purpose with the Vedic tradition: viewing the chart as a reflection of *karma*. The literal translation of the word *karma* is “action,” but its broader concept may be defined as the results of past actions derived from the cycles of reincarnation (*saṃsāra*), with actions in this life determining

⁴⁰ Varāhamihira, *Brhatsaṃhitā*, 12.

⁴¹ Pingree, ed. and trans., *The Yavanajātaka of Sphuṣidhvaṇa*, Vol. 1. 4.

whether there will be either another cycle of reincarnation or the salvation that comes from freedom from this cycle.⁴²

Both Mīnarāja and Varāhamihira state in the first *adhyāya* (chapter), third *śloka* (stanza), of *Vṛddhayaṇajātaka* and *Brhājātaka*, respectively, that the horoscope is a means towards the past and future, as it reveals one's past actions and provides the tools with which one works out that *karma*.

The results of previous actions that the Creator and Destiny have proclaimed by having registered them on the forehead, this science elucidates them, just as a lamp reveals objects in the midst of thick shadows.⁴³

The science of astrology speaks of the results of the good and bad deeds done by men in their previous births.⁴⁴

By placing these explanations so early in the text, only after the benediction to the sun (*adhyāya* 1, *śloka* 1) and the purpose of the text (*adhyāya* 1, *śloka* 2), Mīnarāja and Varāhamihira clearly state that karma is foremost; the horoscope—if properly understood in terms of character strengths and weaknesses, destiny, and planetary cycles—will lay out how, or even if, it is possible to absolve past *karma* and find salvation. Whatever *karmas* have not been fulfilled by the end of life will then be carried over into the next one. *Samsāra*, which literally means “passing through a succession of states,” contributes to a non-judgmental approach to astrology, in which there is no good and evil but simply *karmas* that need to be experienced. The concept of *karma* continues to pervade the Hindu way of life and, in the last half of the twentieth century, has even filtered into the west, although it has been misinterpreted, for the most part, by Westerners who think that there is good and bad karma; in fact, the concept of karma is in itself defined as the suffering one must endure simply by virtue of being reborn. “If this process of endless rebirth is one of suffering, escape from which can be achieved through the minimizing of action and through spiritual knowledge,”⁴⁵ then the knowledge the horoscope reveals, as explained by an adept *jyotiṣi*, can be used as a tool in which to gain that knowledge in the current incarnation, ultimately achieving liberation from this cycle of rebirth.

42 Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, 6.

43 Mīnarāja, *Vṛddhayaṇajātaka*, 1:3; cited in François Chenet, (Jeanne Ferguson, trans.), “Karma and Astrology: An Unrecognized Aspect of Indian Anthropology,” *Diogenes* 33, 129 (Jan., 1985): 111.

44 Varāhamihira, *Brhājātaka*, 1:3. cited in Chenet, “Karma and Astrology,” 111.

45 Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, 7.

Planetary Deities

If the horoscope elucidates the results of past actions and a means of working them out, then it makes perfect sense that the *grahas* (seizers) were so named; as anthropomorphic deities the planets could literally “seize” one’s body and soul for better or worse and, if appeased and propitiated with prayers, mantra, and ritual, could grant blessings and take away hardships.⁴⁶ In addition to propitiating the *grahas* as a group, it is also commonplace to appease one or two *grahas* who will do the most harm, and for the *jyotiṣi* to advise which planets may cause the problem now or in the future. In many cases, the astrologer would not perform the ritual, which would be the domain of the temple priest. At other times, the astrologer may even “recommend and actually prepare for the client various amulets, potions, and other protective devices.”⁴⁷

Navagraha Worship

This elevation of the *grahas* to anthropomorphic status led to images of the planetary deities carved in stone on temple reliefs, lintels, and in the form of icons beginning in the fifth century CE during the Gupta Era. It was not until the sixth and seventh century that Rāhu and Ketu (comet) were added to the pantheon, forming the *navagrahas* (nine planets). Up until this time, Rāhu was mostly known from the story ‘Churning of the Ocean’ (*samudramanthana*), which is narrated in the *Mahābhārata* (1.5:15–17), as the demon who disguises himself as a god and drinks the *amṛta* (nectar of immortality), only to have Viṣṇu sever his head with the throw of his discus (*sudarśanacakra*). As the demonic disembodied head, Rāhu was fated to periodically devour the Sun and Moon, causing eclipses to occur.⁴⁸ In *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, Varāhamihira debunks Rāhu as the precipitator of eclipses, but recognizes him as a *graha*. Though the demon’s head was cut off, it was not deprived of life as a result of his having tasted nectar, and, it is said, assumed the form of a planet.⁴⁹

46 Chenet, “Karma and Astrology,” 111.

47 Judy F. Pugh, “Astrological Counseling in Contemporary India,” *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 7 (1983): 280.

48 Stephen Markel, “The Imagery and Iconographic Development of the Indian Planetary Deities Rahu and Ketu,” *South Asian Studies* 6 (1990): 9–26.

49 Varāhamihira, *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, M. Ramakrishna Bhat (trans.) (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1982), Ch. 5: 1, 42.

Ketu, which is defined as a comet or banner, is always described as fierce and smoky; Varāhamihira lists numerous categories of ketus.⁵⁰

Varāhamihira may have recognized Rāhu as a *graha*, but he did not include Rāhu and Ketu as part of the planetary pantheon in *Brhajjātaka*, in which only Rāhu is listed, along with the other grahas, as lord of one of the eight directions:

The Sun, Venus, Mars, Rāhu, Saturn, Moon, Mercury and Jupiter indicate the East, Southeast, South, Southwest, West, Northwest, North and Northeast, respectively.⁵¹

Rāhu and Ketu first appeared in *jātaka* texts as malefic *grahas* around the seventh or eighth century and, like the other planets, were delineated in signs and houses. They also ruled planetary periods in the *Viṃśottarī Daśā* System, which still remains the most popular system of planetary periods. Around the same time, they became identified as the moon's ascending north and descending south node of the moon—the points formed where the orbit of the moon intersects the plane of the ecliptic—and eventually were depicted as the head and “tail” of a serpent.⁵² In Stephen Markel's view,

Depictions of the nine planets become increasingly common in the eighth century, and are found throughout Northern India in the ninth through twelfth centuries. The sculpted images culminated in the almost life-sized representations from the great, thirteenth-century sun temple at Konārak in eastern India. Painted portrayals flourished in Nepal and parts of India from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, certainly reflecting a much longer tradition, and continue in the popular poster-print format even today.⁵³

Navagraha worship, consisting of propitiating the nine icons placed at temple altars, continues to be one of the most common rituals performed at Hindu temples throughout India and Indian diaspora communities. *Navagraha* altars

⁵⁰ Ibid., Ch. 11, 121–145.

⁵¹ Ibid., Ch. 2: 5, p. 81.

⁵² Stephen Markel, “The Imagery and Iconographic Development of the Indian Planetary Deities Rāhu and Ketu,” *South Asian Studies* 6 (1990): 9.

⁵³ Stephen Markel, “Heavenly Bodies and Divine Images: The Origin and Early Development of Representations of the Nine Planets,” *Southeast Conference Association for Asian Studies Annals* (Chattanooga: University of Tennessee, 1987), 131.

are usually found in a room adjacent to the main hall, where the primary deities, to whom the temple is dedicated, are found. Regardless of where the altar is placed, the *navagrahas* are always included in the *abhiṣeka*, the daily ritual of bathing all the icons in the temple, including rubbing various substances like sesame seed oil or curd, on the icon.⁵⁴ Once the ritual bath is over, the nine icons are dressed in different colored cloths and placed on the altar in three rows of three, which represent the eight directions with the sun, as center of the solar system, facing east. As the closest planets to the sun, Mercury and Venus also face east; Rāhu, Ketu and Mars all face south, in accordance with Mars and Rāhu ruling south and southwest. Saturn and moon face west, since they rule the west and the northwest, respectively. Saturn is back to back with the Sun, since they are considered to be inimical to each other, while moon faces the sun to receive its light. Jupiter faces north. Offerings in order to propitiate the planets and take away their afflictions are performed by placing gifts at the *navagraha* altar. This can include milk, ghee (clarified butter), oil, or an object that the planet rules. Often there are lamps with ghee or sesame oil that are lit with a candle, and placed on a metal tray in front of the altar.

Space and Place: The Built Environment and Pilgrimage

Astrology is not just a matter of human action; it is also embedded in what Guenzi calls the ‘cosmological landscape,’ and Rana Singh, the ‘Sacredscape.’⁵⁵ It is common for significant sacred sites to be aligned with the cardinal points (north, south, east, and west), one of the most impressive examples being the orientation of the hundreds of temples in the complex at Angkor (which alternated between Hindu and Buddhist domination) in Cambodia, to a north-south-east-west grid.⁵⁶ According to Kim Malville, the function of the alignment of sacred sites, temples and city plans in relation to astronomy was to establish “an interior cosmos with order and meaning.”⁵⁷ Elsewhere he described the Hindu temple as “a miniature universe compressed in space and

54 Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, 209.

55 Guenzi. “The Allotted Share,” 39–55 (41); Rana P.B. Singh, *Cosmic Order and Cultural Astronomy: Sacred Cities of India* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 228.

56 Robert Stencel, Fred Gifford, and Eleanor Morón, “Astronomy and Cosmology at Angkor Wat,” *Science* 23, 193 (July 1976): 281–287.

57 John McKim Malville, “Foreword to Rana P.B. Singh,” *Cosmic Order and Cultural Astronomy: Sacred Cities of India* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 1.

time,” providing a home for divinity protected from the chaos of mundane existence.⁵⁸

This principle is extended to domestic architecture in a practice known as *vāstu*, an equivalent of the Chinese *feng shui*, in which the structure and orientation of the home can be designed in order to ensure harmony and stability.⁵⁹ The physical structure of astronomically-aligned and symbolic architecture then becomes a manifestation of time in space, or the calendar in physical form. There are many traditional variants on the calendar but, by the mid to late first-millennium BCE, there was a modern calendar of twelve months, seven-day weeks and other variants such as *tithis*, or lunar days, of which there are thirty in each lunar month.⁶⁰ The calendar then becomes the basis for a series of festivals, including *Dīvali*, or *Diwali*, the festival of lights (including the ‘inner’ light), a five-day, post-harvest, pre-winter-solstice celebration which coincides with the new moon in the sidereal zodiac sign, Libra. Other festivals are based on a planetary calendar, and some are combined with pilgrimage. The most important of these is the Kumbha Mela, which is timed according to the cycles of Jupiter and Sun and is held every twelve years, with smaller, intermediate festivals and occasional, much larger ones.⁶¹ The last Maha (great) Kumbha Mela, which is held every 144 years, or twelve Sun-Jupiter cycles, occurred in 2001 and was attended by an estimated 60 million people. Such events may be understood as a collective expression of astrology as active engagement and harmonisation with the cosmos.

At a grander scale still, history is structured according to the astrological-numerological periods known as *yugas*. The division of *yugas* according to sexagesimal mathematics—multiples of the number six—is documented in the epic poem, *Mahābhārata*, which reached its final form around the fourth century CE. The basic sequence of four *yugas*, or ages, existed within a sequence of decline from an original era of perfection, the *Krita Yuga*, through the periods of *Treta Yuga* and *Dwapara Yuga*, to the present-day period of

58 J. McKim Malville and R.N. Swaminathan, “People, Planets and the Sun: Surya Puja in Tamil Nadu, South India,” *Culture and Cosmos* 2, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1998): 3–15.

59 Sashikala Ananth, *Vaastu: The Classical Indian Science of Architecture and Design* (London: Penguin 1999).

60 S.K. Chatterjee and Apurba Kumar Chakravarty, “Indian Calendar from Post-Vedic Period to AD 1900,” in *History of Astronomy in India*, ed. S.N. Sen and K.S. Shukla (New Delhi: Indian National Science Academy, 1985), 252–307. Plofker and Knudsen, “Calendars in India,” 56.

61 Subas Rai, *Kumbha Mela: History and Religion, Astronomy and Cosmobiology* (Varanasi: Ganga Kaveri Pub. House, 1993).

corruption, violence and immorality, the *Kali Yuga*.⁶² The duration of each period was calculated according to multiples of six (4800, 3600, 2400 and 1200 years respectively) but was extended by a factor of 360—one year in the life of the gods and the number of days in one ideal solar year.⁶³ Although the system of *yugas* is based on numerology, Luis Gonzáles-Reiman has argued that it was established by the astronomers of the Gupta period (320 to 550 CE).⁶⁴ If Gonzáles-Reiman is correct, and the system was established this late then it may have been influenced by the classical system of ‘Great Years,’ in which the basic multiple, 36,000 years, was believed to be the length of one complete cycle of the precession of the equinoxes, the shift of the fixed stars in relation to the sun’s position (0° Aries) at the spring equinox.⁶⁵

Tradition and Modernity

Indian astrology shares its Hellenistic roots with western astrology. However, in the west astrology experienced a dramatic decline in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when confronted with modernity in the rejection of supernatural explanations for natural events. In India, by contrast, the tradition of practice continued unbroken to the present day, although with technical innovation and regional diversification. Martin Gansten has noted that modernity has intervened in the form of attitudes and technology imported from the west, and has identified a number of developments.⁶⁶ First were the ideological imports, which can be divided into (1) anti-astrological attitudes, which can be further distinguished between scientific/sceptic on the one hand, and Christian on the other, and (2) pro-astrology attitudes, carried mainly by theosophy. Ironically, theosophy itself had already carried Indian concepts to the west. This two-way exchange may be seen as an example of what Fernando Ortiz designated ‘transculturation,’ the process by which two cultures merge or mutually interact, influence each other and perhaps produce

62 R.F. Gombrich, “Ancient Indian Cosmology,” in *Ancient Cosmologies*, ed. Carmen Blacker and Michael Loewe (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1975), 120–24.

63 Nicholas Campion, *The Great Year: Astrology, Millenarianism and History in the Western Tradition* (London: Penguin, 1994).

64 Luis Gonzáles-Reiman, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas: India’s Epic Poem and the Hindu System of World Ages* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 169.

65 Campion, *The Great Year*, chaps. 3, 6, and 7.

66 Martin Gansten, “Astrology and Astronomy (Jyotisa),” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar and Vasudha Narayanan (Brill Online 2013), 16–17.

a third culture.⁶⁷ Acculturation, the result of the encounter between two cultures (typically through colonialism) may be identified in more uni-directional exchanges, such as the export of technical Indian astrology to the west, or the export of the use of the modern planets, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, to India. More inroads occurred with the development of *tājika* (literally “Persian”), a new school of astrology that developed alongside *jyotiṣa* in India sometime between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. Still practiced today, the system consisted of Arabic astrological techniques like *Varṣaphala* (“fruit of the year”, or solar returns), and sixteen special *yogas*, or combinations, which were translated from the Persian into Sanskrit and incorporated into Indian horoscopy.⁶⁸ Gansten also points to the introduction of the printing press, which allowed the mass production of astrological texts (followed from the 1990s onwards by the internet, the world-wide web and social media, a phenomenon which has so far not been studied in relation to Indian astrology), and western-style ‘sun sign’ columns in newspapers and magazines.

Controversy was stirred up in 2000 and 2001 by the decision of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to support the development of the teaching of astrology as a university degree subject. This aroused strong opposition amongst some scientists who regarded it as an expression of the BJP’s fundamentalist Hindu project, or “saffronisation” of the educational system.⁶⁹ As part of the resulting ongoing controversy, astrology’s status was challenged in the Bombay Supreme court in 2011. The court affirmed astrology’s status as a 4,000-year-old “science.” The judges’ ruling included the following:

So far as prayer related to astrology is concerned, the Supreme Court has already considered the issue and ruled that astrology is science. The court had in 2004 also directed the universities to consider if astrology science can be added to the syllabus. The decision of the apex court is binding on this court.⁷⁰

Any consideration of the impact of colonialism on astrology can be judged within the relationship between British power and Indian religion. Richard Davis has pointed out that initial contacts resulted in attempts to make Indian

67 Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (New York: Knopf, 1947).

68 Martin Gansten and Ola Wikander, “Sahl and the Tajika Yogas: Indian transformations of Arabic astrology,” *Annals of Science* 68: 4, 532.

69 Jayaraman, “Vedic Astrology,” 119; Anon, “Vedic scholars defend astrology,” *The Times of India* Sept. 18, 2001.

70 Hetal Vyas, “Astrology is a Science: Bombay HC,” *The Times of India*, 3 Feb., 2011.

religion follow Christian norms—for example, in identifying monotheistic tendencies—while a later tendency, from the late nineteenth century onwards, was based around the assertion of difference—as in the institution of public festivals to Hindu gods and their appropriation in the independence struggle.⁷¹ The BJP's support for the inclusion of astrology in University syllabi can be seen in this context, as part of a long-term restoration of identity.

Indian astrology was largely ignored in the west until the 1990s, even though other aspects of Indian cosmology were widely adopted in esoteric circles. For example, the noted theosophical astrologer Alan Leo was both influential in advocating the doctrines of karma and reincarnation, without which he thought astrology made no sense.⁷² Alan Leo formed contacts with Indian astrologers and began to import and distributed Indian astrological texts, in return for which his Indian contacts secured subscribers for his own journals.⁷³ There were even exaggerated and unlikely claims that Indian astrology would itself have died out had not the revival which Leo inspired taken place in the West.⁷⁴ Following his visit to India in 1911 Leo also denounced the popular astrology of India, Tibet, and Burma as no better than ignorant superstition, even though he had high respect for those of its practitioners who, like him, followed a philosophical path. Martin Gansten has argued, though, that when the idea of 'karma' was imported into the west, it moved into a new metaphysical context, away from its Indian concern with action in the world, to a western preoccupation with spiritual symbolism and the inner life.⁷⁵

The English-speaking world paid little attention to Indian technical astrology except for *The Astrological Magazine*, a popular newsstand magazine published in India from 1936–1989, and English language books on Hindu Astrology written by its editor B.V. Raman, which were distributed in the West. Raman even gave a speech to the United Nations in 1970 on "Relevance of Astrology in Modern Times."⁷⁶ The publications, however, took so long to arrive, and were

71 Richard H. Davis, "Religions of India in Practice" in *Asian Religions in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 32–41.

72 Alan Leo, *Esoteric Astrology: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Modern Astrology, 1925, [1913]), vii.

73 F.W. Lacey, "Early Days in Astrology," in *The Life and Work of Alan Leo*, ed. Bessie Leo (London: Modern Astrology 1919), 46.

74 Alan Leo, "The Editor's Observatory," *Modern Astrology, New Series* 8, no. 6 (June 1911): 223.

75 Martin Gansten, "Reshaping Karma: an Indic Metaphysical Paradigm in Traditional and Modern Astrology," in *Cosmologies*, ed. Nicholas Campion (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2010), 52–68.

76 New York Times, www.nytimes.com/1998/12/23/world/bangalore-venkata-raman-indian-astrologer-dies-at-86.html, accessed on 21 April, 2014.

written in very formal English with strange-sounding concepts. As a result, Indian astrology had little influence in the West, except on those who were generally fascinated by the subject and patient enough to wait for the publications to arrive.

This changed during the period from the late 1980s through the 1990s as part of what might be called a post-modern turn that included a wider rediscovery of first Medieval and then Classical and Hellenistic astrological practices.⁷⁷ Hindu astrology, as it was called, was rebranded as ‘Vedic’ in order to project a spiritual image and counter the attitudes expressed by Leo. Groups and movements, such as Self-Realization Fellowship and Transcendental Meditation, which were founded, respectively, by Paramahansa Yogananda and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi—Indian teachers who had emigrated to the West—attracted a large following, and included astrology as part of their recommended teachings. In *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Yogananda specifically talks about his guru Yukteswar recommending astrology.⁷⁸ The Maharishi University of Management (MUM), which Mahesh Yogi founded, offers “vedic” astrology in its syllabus, the declared purpose being ‘to know future trends in life and prevent problems coming from one’s past actions . . . (and) to give a vision of the connection between the individual and the cosmos and the mechanics by which this relationship can be nourished and enriched through Maharishi Jyotish and Maharishi Tagya.’⁷⁹

The American Council of Vedic Astrology (ACVA), the British Association of Vedic Astrology (BAVA), and other organizations emerged outside India in order to teach, publish, and hold conferences. The majority of the members of these organisations, though, tend to be westerners. Teachers are invited from India, but the network of astrologers based, at least, in the Indian communities in the UK and USA tend not to engage with western networks. Many students study both western and Indian systems, although some identify with Indian culture due to identification with the aforementioned spiritual groups. Some even go to the extent of converting to Hinduism. ACVA—which ultimately split into the American College of Vedic Astrology (ACVA) and the Council for Vedic Astrology (CVA)—and BAVA both have strong ties to the Indian Council of Astrological Sciences (ICAS), which was founded in 1984 by B.V. Raman. As the largest and most authoritative organization dedicated to teaching *jyotiṣa*, the

77 Nicholas Champion, “The Traditional Revival in Modern Astrology: a Preliminary History,” *Astrology Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 28–38.

78 Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Los Angeles: Self Realisation Fellowship, 11th edition, 1988) 187.

79 <http://www.mum.edu/default.aspx?RelId=641663>, accessed 8 January 2014.

ICAS offers certification in Vedic Astrology through its branches throughout India.⁸⁰

The term “Vedic” has been re-exported to India, even though the astrology contained in the Vedas is so rudimentary that the term “Vedic” astrology is, as Jyanat Narlikar concluded, a misnomer.⁸¹ Gansten notes that this example of re-acculturation is representative of the so-called ‘pizza effect,’ in which culture is exported, transformed and then re-imported by its original host country.⁸² The term “Vedic Astrology” has become so popular in India that, in 2001, some astrologers attacked supposed plans to separate astrology from what they claimed was its Vedic origins.⁸³ The term “Vedic” is now in widespread use as, for example, by Jayaraman in his attack on the BJP’s development of astrology as a university discipline.⁸⁴

Whether we call it “Vedic” or not, horoscopic astrology brings immense cosmic patterns into the mundane details of personal life and occupies a central and unquestioned part of Indian life. One of its most public applications is in arranged marriages, from providing an additional (although rarely the only) factor for assessing compatibility to arranging the date for weddings.⁸⁵ In late 2010 the *Washington Post* reported on a typical marital problem and the solution astrology offers: a pregnant woman whose marriage was in trouble could at least ensure better fortune than otherwise by selecting an auspicious date to induce her baby’s birth. The *Post* continued:

Indians have been asking astrologers for the perfect time to conceive for centuries. Now, with rising incomes and improved access to health care, many take their gurus’ advice to their gynecologists to decide birth times as well.

“In the last three years, it has become rampant. Almost everyone prefers to choose timing,” says Rishma Dhillon Pai, a Mumbai-based gynecologist. “It’s strange, because you would think that as we grow more modern, this kind of thing would happen less.”

80 See the website of the Indian Council of Astrological Sciences, www.icasindia.org, accessed on 12 March 2013.

81 Narlikar, Jyanat V. “Vedic Astrology or Jyotirvigyan: Neither Vedic nor Vigyan,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 24 (June 16–11, 2001): 2113–15.

82 Gansten, “Astrology and Astronomy (Jyotisa),” 17.

83 Anon, “Detaching astrology from Vedas frowned upon,” *The Times of India*, Aug 27, 2001; Jayaraman, “Vedic Astrology,” 117–119.

84 Anon, “Detaching astrology,” Aug 27, 2001.

85 Steven Kemper, “Sinhalese Astrology, South Asian Caste Systems, and the Notion of Individuality,” *Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (May 1979): 477–97.

While there are no data on how often C-section timings are decided by astrology, the number of caesarean deliveries has surged in India. In the early 1990s, around 5% of births in urban hospitals were caesarean. Today more than 20% are, doctors say, in part because of higher incomes and wider access to health care...

While the vast majority of Indians still prefer natural birth, doctors say the number of caesarean sections where cosmic timing is a factor has jumped from perhaps one-in-10 a decade ago to as many as one-in-two today. Usually, the timing is chosen only after a C-section has been deemed necessary. But doctors say a growing number of women are opting for the procedure when there is no medical need.⁸⁶

Catarina Guenzi argues that economic liberalisation in India has had an impact on the language of astrology. Jayaraman puts this crudely, talking about the “cash registers ringing,” mistaking the extent to which astrology is not a commodity to be purchased, but a strategy for effectively managing one’s affairs in harmony with an understanding of one’s place in the cosmos.⁸⁷ However, Guenzi considers that, amongst the new upper and middle-classes, the concept of destiny is now “conceived as a malleable resource, as an investment that can be increased, diminished, or wasted, depending on the choices that one makes in life.”⁸⁸ For such clients, the astrologer then elaborates the potential strategies that the upwardly-mobile Indian citizen can employ, while offering any of the more traditional services if required, performed in a temple context.⁸⁹ At the time of the dispute over the creation of university degrees in 2001, one respondent told the *Times of India*, “consulting astrologers has psychological uses too. I believe if an astrologer tells a troubled person things will be all right in the next six months, the person will embark on a positive process of self-help.”⁹⁰ There were some doubts, though, and astrologers at an ‘astrology camp’ at Lucknow in 2003 expressed “concern at the rising trend among the youth to ape the western culture and treating astrology as an insignificant

86 Eric Bellman, “When the Stars Align, Indians Say, It’s a Good Time to Have a C-Section: Moms-to-Be Consult Their Astrologers, Request the Operation on Auspicious Days,” *Washington Post* (5 Oct. 2010), 1.

87 Jayaraman, “Vedic Astrology,” 117–119, (117).

88 Guenzi, “The Allotted Share,” 41.

89 Lilan Laishley, “South Indian Ritual Magic Disperses Negative Karma in the Birthchart” in *Celestial Magic*, ed. Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), forthcoming.

90 Nilanjana Bhaduri Jha, “Astrology: The debate continues,” *The Times of India*, Sep 9, 2001.

subject, speakers hailed the government move to include astrology in the university curriculum.”⁹¹ However, although Jayaraman insisted that science students do not consult astrologers, other evidence suggests that there is no clash between astrology and modernity. For example, according to the *Times of India*,

Politicians making a beeline to the astrologer during elections is not new. But now, it's techies. Some consult astrologers for timely delivery of projects or a new job, while others bring issues concerning promotions or offshore assignments. The number of software professionals seeking consultation is increasing manyfold, say leading city astrologers.⁹²

It is well-known, anecdotally, that astrology, being so pervasive, is used at the highest levels of finance and politics, but there has been no study of this. For example, while the times of the proclamation of Burmese independence and the Sri Lankan Republic were determined astrologically, reliable documentation of astrological engagement in the date of the Indian Republic has not been published.⁹³ However, it is said that Mrs Gandhi, for example, relied heavily on her astrological gurus, as did her son and successor as Prime Minister, Rajiv. According to Pranay Gupte, “Not long after the assassination of the Prime Minister [Mrs Gandhi], it was announced by her son and successor, Rajiv Gandhi, that national parliamentary elections would be held across India on December 24 and 27 [1984]. Astrologers consulted by the Congress Party chieftains said that those were the most auspicious dates for a poll, and so it was decided that the election would be held in some states on the first date and in the rest of the country on the later date.”⁹⁴ Congress won a landslide victory with 401 out of 508 seats contested.

91 Anon, “Collection of 351 Horoscopes Released,” *The Times of India*, May 12, 2003.

92 Geeta Bilinele, “What do the stars hold? Techies want to know,” *The Times of India*, Aug 16, 2008.

93 For Burma see *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (London: Longmans 1948), 9035. For Sri Lanka see BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, monitoring Colombo Home Service Broadcast in English, 12.45 pm GMT, 22 May 1972.

94 Pranay Gupte, *Vengeance: India after the Assassination of Indira Gandhi* (Canada: Penguin, 1985), 166.

Conclusion

Astrology remains a central part of Indian culture and hence religion, representing a tradition of practice that is almost two thousand years old in its technical form, with deeper roots in previous Indian cosmology. An understanding of its practice and theory is essential for a full understanding of religion and its place in modern Indian society.

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