

Notes on The Hindu Concept of the Soul

Gary Gomes

First of all, it is important to identify Hinduism as a set of religions and beliefs rather than as set orthodox system of beliefs. The current division of sects dates back to the days of Adi Sankara, who organized the Smartist Sect of the Sanatana Dharma, the correct term for Hinduism (also known as the “eternal law”, the “eternal law”) into four primary sects¹:

These are:

The Saiva Sect—These are worshippers of Shiva. Shiva is one of the representations of God as creator and destroyer. It is a devotional sect dedicated to the Agamic teachings of South India and Kashmir Shaivism in the extreme north of India. The dating of this group is open to question, but this group has the greatest potential for being connected with the Mohenjo-Daro civilization, as it stresses meditation and quiet, and there is some representations of individuals in apparent meditation in the seals from that civilization. Also, it is the closest of any of the sects to a natural religion, as Shiva has a very strong connection with animals, and one of his many names is *Pasupati*, or “lord of beasts”. Shiva is essentially considered to be the universe, the Great God, and one of the aphorisms in Indian Yoga is that “Jiva” (the individual soul) is “Shiva”(the universal soul). Essentially, humans are individual manifestations of the soul of Shiva, and this is the basis of Vedanta (see below) in which the human soul makes its way to the earth in an effort to learn or fulfill some desire, then finally, after awhile, returns to Shiva. A relatively minor deity in the Rig Veda (he starts gaining prominence in the later Yajur Veda), he is called Rudra, the howler. Religious beads called rudrakshas are attributed to Shiva. Shaiva groups are usually the ones involved in the most extreme forms of asceticism, such as forgoing food, or engaging in extreme penance for extended periods of time. Incidentally, although we shall discuss the concept of nakshatras (essentially, fixed star placements) later, it is interesting to note here that Shiva, despite being an ascetic, has a family, and his marriage to his wife Parvati is alleged to have occurred under the lunar mansion (fixed star) location in Leo (Simha) called Uttaraaphalguni, and his son Kartikeya, is said to come from the nakshatra Krittika, (really the Pleiades, also referred to in Indian mythology as the place of the seven sages).² Kartikeya is also regarded by many as the ruler of astrology, and he is said to travel from planet to planet on his airship. (Since this deity is a representation of the logical mind, and is said to have wandered throughout the universe, this is a logical conclusion, given Hindu beliefs).³ Within the Shaivite tradition, he fulfills the functions of Lord Brahma (who fell out of favor for lusting after his daughter, knowledge (Saraswati), but Kartikeya is a renunciant and therefore not subject to lust), and to an extent, Vishnu (see below) as Kartikeya is called in to fight the toughest forces of evil.⁴

The Vaishnava sect—This particular group of devotees, again with no agreed upon origin, swears allegiance to Vishnu, the pervader and preserver of the universe. Vishnu is considered to be the manifestation of divinity that allowed life to come to the world, by actually visiting creation instead of viewing it from afar. Generally, the most placid of the Vedic deities, stories abound about his patience and benevolence (one great sage Bhrigu kicks him to awaken him and when Vishnu awakens, he asks Bhrigu if the sage has hurt his foot). Incidentally, it is in the avatars that one sees a deliberate reference in keeping with the idea of Vishnu's life preserving nature and his generosity and grace, he incarnates occasionally to save the world from disaster:

Meena Avatar- Vishnu through Ketu-This avatar showed itself as a huge fish that saved the world from destruction in a flood. This avatar represents Ketu's ability to swim the spiritual seas and also represents Ketu's ties with catastrophes that wipe things out—but that also give opportunities for spiritual growth.

Varaha Avatar—Vishnu through Rahu. This represents Vishnu as a huge boar who swallowed the earth to save it from destruction. The swallowing of the earth represents the need to take drastic, unorthodox action at times, but also shows how Rahu encompasses all the earth as the nature of desire, and how it can win the whole earth—for a time at least!

Kurma Avatar—Vishnu through Saturn. This avatar appeared when the world was created and needed to be lifted from the depths of the ocean. It, like Saturn, shows the need for foundation, and also addresses Saturn's nature as a "drying" planet. Kurma avatar was conceived to provide a base for the earth and to allow the earth to be raised out of the sea so the gods could secure the elixir of immortality (the amrita) from the ocean. The most interesting thing about this incarnation is that as Saturn provides this major foundation for the churning of the elixir of immortality, it also sets the stage for the mischief of Rahu and Ketu exhibit in the Vedic chart, for without this activity, the Asura Rahu would never have attained immortality...but neither would the devas!

Narasimha Avatar- Vishnu through Mars—Many years ago, a demon was granted a boon that he could not be destroyed in day or night, inside or outside, by man or beast. Narasimha avatar appeared from a temple column near an entrance, at dusk, and was a lions head and paws on a man's body. Mars rules accidents and sudden attacks. It also acts as a warrior to right wrongs. The sudden, catastrophic nature of Mars is revealed by this Avatar.

Vamana Avatar-Vishnu through Jupiter. In Indian religion, there is a perpetual battle between those who attain power and become like the Gods (technically called Devas) and the Devas themselves. In this case, a demon king, Bali, had gained power and the Gods were deposed from their high status. Now Bali was not evil...as a matter of fact he was quite a good ruler and the world prospered under his rule. What had happened was that his rule had distorted the balance of

the universe that needed restoration. This avatar took the form of a boy or dwarf priest, who appeared before Bali and requested a boon / favor). Bali, being very honorable, told the small priest to take whatever he wished. The small priest asked for only enough land that he could cover in three steps. As soon as Bali consented to this, the boy/dwarf grew to enormous size—with one step, he covered the earth, with the next he covered the heavens, and was looking for a place to put his last step. Bali offered his own head. Although Bali lost everything, Vamana granted to Bali the status of being king of the Gods in the next cycle of creation. This illustrates the use of wile and non-violence to achieve ends, shows the graciousness of Jupiter towards his opponents (although delayed for a long while) and demonstrates Jupiter's legalistic disposition and willingness to support the established order.

Parasurama Avatar-Vishnu through Venus. (Rama with a Battle Axe) . Parasurama was a Brahmin Priest with a war-like temperament who killed all of the warriors who lived in his time because they had killed his father. The story shows the passion and loyalty of Venus and its commitment to purification of corruption, sometimes at a considerable cost. There are other stories about Parasurama, including the rather interesting one in which his father requests that he kill his mother for thinking impure thoughts. He must also kill his brothers for refusing to honor their father's wishes. With unquestioning loyalty, he fulfills his father's request. His father then asks what Parasurama would like as a reward for granting his request. Parasurama asks that his family be brought back to life. Venus is charged with bringing the dead back to life, and is also the guru or teacher of the demons, or those who desire rapid spiritual progress. So Venus' role in astrology is to control lust and desire not to provoke it. This also fits in with its rulership of the book of rituals or personal sacrifice, an habitually overlooked aspect of Venus.

Rama Avatara-Vishnu through the Sun. This is one of the better-known incarnations of Vishnu. Rama is a Prince, who along with his brother, Lakshmana, is exiled from his father's kingdom because of his stepmother's wish to have her son, Bharat, on the throne. In the epic book the Ramayana, Rama agrees to exile in the forest to honor his father's pledge to Rama's stepmother. He lived there with Lakshmana and his devoted wife Sita, until encountering the demon king (actually a powerful Brahmin priest who acquired great supernatural powers) Ravana, who through a series of events, kidnapped Sita, who is considered by some an analog for the earth. Rama had to fight to defeat Ravana (who had committed atrocities among many neighboring groups) and eventually reclaimed Sita and his kingship. Sadly, when Sita was reclaimed, even though she had declined Ravana's advances, many accounts indicate that Rama's subjects felt her to be unclean because of her presence in Ravana's company, so Rama acceded to the wishes of his subjects and exiled her. (Some accounts do indicate that Rama and Sita lived to old age together, but this is a far less common account.) Rama is a hero's hero—he honors his father's wishes, defeats evil, saves the girl, and even stoically accepts his fate when his wife is

forced away because he must fulfill his duty. The story, especially its conclusion, is about the triumph of duty over desire—a key theme in India and a key element in evaluating spiritual progress. (An interesting side note; Ravana was so powerful he had control over all of the nine planets and used them, turned upside down, as stepping stones to his throne. Saturn suggested that he turn them right side up so Ravana could see their discomfort when he walked on them. However, Saturn's look has the power to destroy, so when Saturn was able to look at Ravana, Ravana became deranged and started to desire Sita, which was his undoing. Given, Ravana's immense power, it is no wonder Vishnu needed to manifest through the most powerful *graha*, the Sun, to defeat Ravana. It represents the eternal light of the Sun, that dispels darkness and evil.)

Krishna—Vishnu through the Moon—Krishna is by far, the most popular incarnation of Vishnu. He is charming and delightful and even as a young child, shows signs of his divinity. There are many stories connected to Krishna, but I find two very telling. He has variety of Gopis —essentially water nymphs—with whom he plays and they all love him. Some conservative groups would say this is a metaphorical love; others report it as actual lovemaking. So Krishna, like the Moon in its myths, has many lovers (the lunar mansions are usually referred to as the Moon's wives). He shows the ability to enjoy the world without attachment to it. Likewise, in the *Mahabharata*, the great epoch tale of war between clans in India, Krishna joins in the war, not as a fighter, but as a charioteer. He is the charioteer for Arjuna, whose name means “the shining mind”. Arjuna is a great warrior, but he has pangs of conscience about killing his relatives. And Krishna, as his guide who keeps the horses of his chariot (his wavering nature) under control, tells him he must fight! But the things that Krishna is telling Arjuna to fight are not people so much as desires. Because if he does not fight and kill these desires, they will block his path to spirituality and, even more importantly, to fulfilling his duty or obligation—and he must fulfill his destiny. This dialogue is contained in the *Bhagavad Gita*, a part of the *Mahabharata*, which is a condensation of the spiritual principles contained in Hinduism (also called the Sanatana Dharma, or the eternal or unchanging law). Some authorities interpret the Bhagavad Gita more literally, and this makes sense to them; but the Moon as one of the luminaries, guides the shining mind, almost like a mother would guide an errant child, as Krishna guides Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The difference between Rama and Krishna is fascinating; one shows the way by doing (Rama); the other through discrimination (Krishna). Krishna is also more like us than the other avatars. He has fun, he fights, he plays pranks—he is the most human, apart from Buddha, of the Avatars, and he understands our human frailties. So, like the Moon, even as he changes, he guides.

Buddha Avatar—Vishnu's incarnation through Mercury. This incarnation is very interesting, as most of us are at least somewhat aware of the life of Buddha. First of all, he is a verifiable historical figure. (Some would maintain that all the avatars are!) but Buddha has left a definite legacy. He founded a method to liberation, not a religion per se. He had been sheltered from the outside world as a young

prince and only had beauty and youth around him when he was growing up; he wanted to see the world outside, and his father objected, but he determined to go anyway. He saw old age, disease and poverty. It was then that he started to question his life and he left his family to study with spiritual teachers. He studied with Indian Priests and their ornate rituals, but this did not satisfy him as he found the rituals too complicated for him to think about reality. When he went with the ascetics, who mortified their flesh, he found that this also distracted. So he went back to moderate eating and drinking. He then realized the nature of reality by sitting under a tree and meditating. He involved the ascetics, some of whom joined him. Brahmin India absorbed many of his ideas into the Hindu fabric...so much so that Buddhism is almost non-existent in its native country of India. It exists in Sri Lanka and throughout most of Southeast Asia as a wide spread religion, but was absorbed into Indian mainstream though. Buddhism is atheistic, in that it does not need a creator God to explain the creation of the world—the world works according to the rules of karma. So it is a very scientific religion, well suited to rationalistic civilizations in its purest form. One can readily see Mercury in this pattern as Mercury can see all dimensions of an argument and about reality. This rationalistic impulse can also treat religion as a concept, and spiritual liberation as an intellectual exercise, but it is also good for our perspective, as it helps us realize everything is transient, and passing.

This sect views deity as being an activist god, someone who comes down to earth to write wrongs. In this way, this God comes closer to the Christian conception of God, but he arrives on the earth more frequently. The most popular incarnation of God in this sect is Krishna, and the group known in the West as the Hare Krishnas come from this group.

The view of the soul is somewhat different from the Shaivites, in that the soul is viewed as separate from God, and not able to reform with God, because they are individually created souls. While the Shaivites dream of re-merging with God, the Vaishnavas dream of achieving liberation through attaining Vishnu's blue heaven and bathing in the bliss of his company.⁵

Shaktism.is a system of worship dedicated to the divine mother, in all her aspects, from the benevolent and giving :Lakshmi to bloodthirsty Kali. The sect essentially believes in using a variety of techniques, such as mantra (sacred words), Tantra (sacred rituals), Yantra (sacred illustration and diagrams, yoga (physical and mental union with God through exercise and meditation) and puja (specific worship of the gods. This is the closest of all the traditions to the Western magical tradition, as devotees use these acts to open the kundalini—energy at the base of the spine that, when activated, can force union with God. The view of the soul, is, as in Shaivism, is that the soul can re-establish unity with Shiva or God—so the soul can be liberated. So, it is prevalently viewed as a Vedanta system as it advocates union with God—not sitting in his company.

Smartist Sect

The name of the Sect derives from the fact that this is a ritualistic sect. Founded by Adi Sankaram, it is a universalist Hindu sect that welcomes all. Individuals can choose whichever gods (from a set of about 6) it wants to worship. So, the *Ishta Devata* the person wishes to worship will determine what one believes the soul will be. One could choose Vishnu as deity and have a dualistic (separate god and soul) belief system. The others would lean towards the non-dualistic belief system of the other deities.

What is the soul?

The conception of the soul in Hindu belief is really relevant in connection with God, or Brahman (otherwise known as the reality—the state in which all reality exists). The two principle beliefs are that we are connected to Brahman and have always been connected to Brahman, but simply have forgotten, either because of ignorance or desire, of our divine nature. This is called Advaita Vedanta, and is, as we saw above, practiced by Shaivites and Saktis. The motivation for the soul's departure is open to speculation, but some theorize that the soul leaves to experience something in a more limited existence, under the illusion (*Maya*) that this will make them happy. When the soul attains a body, this triggers other desires because it is in a body. Eventually, over many, many lifetimes, the person gets tired of seeing the same things over and over again and starts wanting to return to Brahman. Either through many (millions) of lifetime or through advanced yogic practices, one ultimately returns to Brahman.

The Dvaita (dualistic) school believes that all souls are individual and self-contained, and they are always separate from God. This school often holds that all souls are all created at the same time, but they reincarnate into different shells in order to experience different types of existence. Beings on this earth are not yet worthy of being with God, so they must build up merit, either through, acts or devotion. Eventually these souls do enough good works, or repeat enough mantra or ritual enough acts to sit next to Vishnu in Heaven.

There is a belief held in India by some that those who lead evil lives are reincarnated as lesser beings—animals or trees—or that some get born into different cultures, but reincarnation is a central concept of belief in most Hindu belief systems. One notable—and extinct—sect called the Charvakas dated at approximately 600 BCE, although dates differ—see: <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/3440/charvaka.html> --were entirely materialistic and do not give any credence to an after life or reincarnation. Also, although not as extreme in their beliefs, Buddhism and Jainism, both of which originated on the Indian subcontinent, are atheistic in that there is no personal god to return to in their belief system.

Advaita is generally considered more difficult to practice as a belief system, because it the necessity of constantly remembering one is connected to the

divine. Dvaita is a bit less intense from a personal perspective, although some groups connected with this school (specifically the Hare Krishna movement) require far more stringent behavior than most advaita schools.⁶

Most groups in India believe that Jyotisha, or Indian astrology, provides a way to read the patterns of past-life karma.

Both groups encourage renunciation or at the very least, moderation so the individual has fewer attachments to this world to bind him or her here. The principal idea is to cultivate non-attachment through *Santosha* or contentment with the world, and later, this will lead to less ambitions to fulfill that would interfere with one's ambition to return to the reality, be it with form (*Saguna Brahman*—this usually means a certain God, like Vishnu, will represent Brahman, and the other version of the reality is *Nirguna Brahmani*, which, although it has a nature and a life, does not have a personality—and this can make *Nirguna Brahman*, and consequently, *Advaita Vedanta*, very difficult for the normal person without an abstract perspective on deity.

Textual References:

Reincarnation is mentioned in virtually every major Hindu text:

Here is a listing of the primary SRUTI (fully cognized and divinely provided texts) and SMRTI (texts divinely inspired, but written by humans and subject to interpretation). One may make the distinction here of the division between laws and regulations

Srutis

Rig Veda – This is the oldest recognized text, dated from 1500 BCE to 6,000 BCE by various sources. 1028 hymns are dedicated to a wide range of gods, including Indra, Agni and Varuna. Lunar mansions are mentioned in this Veda.

Yajur Veda (Veda of Liturgy)—This is a priestly book, designed to provide instruction is the establishment of the proper set-up, timing and execution of ritual. There are some timing elements based on Soli-Lunar combinations.

Sama Veda—These are select hymns of the Rig Veda, placed in devotional settings. Some translations of the Bhagavad Gita refer to this as the highest Veda.

Atharva Veda—This is the Veda connected with spells, incantations and rituals for practical matters that affect most people. Astrology, especially nakshatras, are mentioned in this text.

The liturgical core of each of the Vedas are supplemented by commentaries on each text which all belong to the śruti cannon:

- Brahmanas

- Aranyakas
- Upanishads (these are the most commonly read by Westerners, and, in some regards, the easiest of these books to understand)

The literature of the schools, further amplifies the material associated with each of the four core traditions of Hinduism, but virtually every tradition in Hinduism stresses final liberation or reunification with god (or Brahman).

Particular sections of the Bhagavata purana relating to the catur sloki and the concept of *svayam bhagavan* are considered Śruti by some Vaishnava Vedantists, as is the Mahabharata (an *Itihasa*, or History) or at least the chapter within the Mahabharata known as the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Among South Indian Shaivites, a Tamil language text called the *Tirukural* is considered a Shruti text as well.

SMRTI'S

These texts date from around 500 BCE and are regarded as secondary in authority to the Shruti texts.

These include texts such:

The Laws of Manu (the oldest known Smṛti),

The Itihasas, which are the epic works like *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*, and

The Puranas—These are at least twenty sets of books that cover areas like the creation of the universe, dissolutions and recreation of the universe, the genealogy of devas and sages, the birth of the human race, and the evolution of dynasties.

The *Thirumantiram*, a South Indian Tamil text, fits roughly as Smṛti. (This text explains yoga practices such as those described in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, but in much more detail.

All of these texts contain astrological references (the Mahabharata contains references to activities begun under certain nakshatras, or lunar mansions and *The Skanda Purana* at 71,000 lines, three times larger than any other Purana, contains an extensive discussion of astrology), Most Puranas were though to be written long before they were actually written down and published in the Gupta dynasty between 300-500 CE.

A discussion of how these texts work into the overall view of the universe

Development of Philosophy and Integration of Mythology in Vedic Astrology

A NOTE ON HISTORY: Although I will not delve into the history of Hinduism at this point, it is important to remember that, within the culture and religion itself,

Hinduism is regarded as having no identified founder, and many of the theories of how this system of belief came into India are in contention currently. Given the similarity between some European beliefs, the Aryan invasion theory was developed in the 19th century, with virtually no archaeological evidence. More recent hypotheses about the Mohenjo-Daro civilization being the foundation for the development of Hinduism are not well-documented either and subject to dispute from various authorities, and research within this area will probably continue for some time. So neither theory at this time is satisfactory.

The gods and myths of India represent an enormous body of work, so this will not attempt to list them all, let alone analyze all of the implications of these myths. But we will attempt to cover to determine some appropriate links with Vedic Astrology or Jyotisha.

The basic theories of the development of Hindu Mythology tend to divide into those that argue that the Vedas prefigured everything that came after (this belief is based upon a reinterpretation of the dating of the Vedas that contrasts with Western scholarship) (see Feuerstein, Kak and Frawley, *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization* and see Thompson, Richard, *Vedic Cosmography and Cosmology*, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, United States, 1989, 242 pages for a religious historical perspective on the dating of both the Vedas and other texts such as the *Surya Siddhantha*)) and those that argue that the Vedas were imposed upon a pre-existing culture between 1200 BCE and 500 BCE that had more in common with Greek society (Danielou, Alain, *The Myths and Gods of India*, Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont, 1991, 441 pages and McKenzie, Donald, *India*, Senate Publishing, London, England, 1995, 463 pages). There are valid arguments on all sides, but many recent authorities, both orthodox and unorthodox, have been pushing the origins of civilization in India, backwards, so it is not unreasonable to form earlier dates for many traditions and/or classical texts.

The Vedic texts, especially the Rig Veda, the Black and White Yajur Veda, and the Sama Veda are thought to be the original Vedic texts, joined relatively late by the Atharva Veda at about 500 BCE. The Atharva Veda contains the first references to Indian astrology that can be recognized in its current form. Was this an early interaction between Indian culture and foreign cultures, or was this an indigenous development? We don't know, as details are lacking, and lack of astrology texts prevents an objective assessment of the use of this knowledge by the culture.

The Vedas were thought to have reflected a very ritualistic culture, in which propitiation of the gods (*devas*) played an important part in the life of the culture and people. It is also noteworthy that, as far back as the Rig Veda, astronomical references, particularly references to the fixed stars or nakshatras, are mentioned prominently, and this is the basis for some scholars dating these texts as far back as 8,000 years ago). The number of gods mentioned in the Rig Veda

is astonishing, but the predominant deities seem to be the Rudra (who is considered by some to be a representation of Shiva); Agni, the god of the sacrifice, Surya, the Sun God, Varuna, the judge of the world, Ushas, goddess of the dawn, Ratri, goddess of the night, and Chandra, the Moon, identified with Soma, the sacred drink of the gods. Mitra was also there, as a deity that had strong identification with the Persian, Mithra, whose cult made its way into the middle east and later Rome. Indra, the chief of the gods—he apparently took over this position from Varuna—was a popular god who had traits in common with thunder gods in other societies, such as Greek Zeus and Norse Thor. (This was not uncommon. When Alexander invaded in the fourth century BCE, he and his soldiers were surprised to find Indian figures that shared attributes of Herakles and Dionysos—Krishna and Shiva. (Feuerstein et al. pp. 233-235.) Many parallels can be found between Hindu Gods and their Greek and Norse counterparts (MacKenzie, pp. 19-37) Ultimately, these myths provide a common ground for linking the planets with the Vedic deities.

The transition from the Vedas to the Upanishads around 600 BCE-400 BCE marked a shift from a ritualistic society to a more introspective one, and helped lay the foundation for Buddhism. The Upanishadic philosophy was not a popular form of mysticism, but probably helped lay the foundation for Buddhism and Jainism, which essentially refined even more the mystical concepts contained in the Upanishads.

The next important step in Hindu religious thought belongs to an earlier systematizer of religious principles, Badarayana (fifth century BCE), who developed a system of dualist thought and is the apparent creator of systematic theology which reconciled the mysticism of the *Upanishads* with earlier religious thought contained in the Vedas, and built a system for interpreting the revealed knowledge of the Vedas and Upanishads. He laid the foundation for systematic thought for generations to come that allowed in variations into Hindu thought such as Nyaya (logic) and cosmology (Sankhya), among others. He also may have been one of the first individually identified thinkers who equated the attainment of Brahman—or unity with the reality, or god—as the ultimate goal of human life, although the thought is contained in earlier documents.

In the timeline of religious thought, some date the *Itihasas*, or epic texts, as arriving between 500 BCE and 100 BCE. These texts, including the *MahaBharata*, the largest epic poem ever composed, were and remain a foundation for ethical conduct. The most important single part of this work though, is considered to be the *Bhagavada Gita* or Song of God, in which a sage eavesdrops on Krishna and Arjuna's discussion about duty, desire and action (karma). The Gita systematizes into one short book, the entire essence of the philosophy of karma yoga, or the way by which one can achieve the highest spiritual state through his or her action in the world. It is an essential text for those who wish to understand the concept of yoga.

Another landmark achievement (estimated to have been written between 200 BCE and 400 CE) were the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. Many scholars think that these Sutras are a condensation of earlier concepts contained in the Vedas, and later Indian religious texts. These works described, in detail, the benefits of meditation; meditation as the path to God-consciousness, but also, towards the end of the sutras, to the attainment of various *siddhis* or occult powers, one being knowing the past, present and future through meditation on the Sun. The *Yoga Sutras* are very short, but these have been used as a teaching tool (like the *Bhagavad Gita*) for close to 2,000 years.

Important thinkers like Nagarjuna developed critiques of Buddhist thinking and Vasubandhu defended Buddhist thought.

Ishvarikrishna (350 – 425) developed the school of Sankhya philosophy and essentially set up a system in which spirit interacts with matter, but is essentially independent of it. This is important in that spirit can manipulate matter, but does not have to be tied to it. While this can be seen as a reflection of Patanjali's teachings, it is also a differentiation in that we are allowed to create our reality, but do not have to be tied to it, laying the foundation for the thought that liberation from matter can be achieved while one is alive.

These schools show systems of thought that are in no way incompatible with an astrological view of the world as contained in Indian astrology. The point at which an astrological system would be in most difficulty would be the development of the Buddhist or Jainistic traditions, because these are unrelenting in their path to liberation, and there is some speculation that the traditions of the Brahmins, including astrology, suffered when Buddhism gained ascendancy, both during Ashoka's reign and again around 200 CE, but these were not substantial eliminations of astrological practice. Books like the *Arthashastra* (written no later than 150 CE, and dated by some at 500 BCE), a political text, contain references to astrologers, and religious texts like the *Grihya Sutras* (estimated to have been written no earlier than 500 BCE) contain rituals for planetary propitiation.

The foundational religious texts of India—the Vedas—are said to be ruled by certain planets—The *Rig Veda* (the oldest spiritual text) is ruled by Jupiter; the *Yajur Veda*, which is a book of priestly rituals, is ruled by Venus, the *Sama Veda*, the book of hymns, is ruled by Mars, and the *Atharva Veda*, the most recent of the four, is ruled by Mercury. The books range from very lofty discourses on the nature of existence (the *Rig Veda*) to a book of practical magic—for lack of a better term—embodied in the *Atharva Veda*. In some ways, the assignments are very apt, as Jupiter rules philosophy, Venus rules courtesy, and charm and, by implication, appropriate behavior. Appropriate behavior i.e. following the rules of praise, are at the heart of the Vedic rituals. Mars rules action and energy (praise and actual worship) and Mercury rules practical knowledge. Among the other planets, the Sun and Moon are the rulers of everything, but they do render divine light and knowledge to the world, while Saturn provides a foundation. Rahu rules

unorthodox beliefs and Ketu gives direct spiritual access. There is also some astronomical information contained in the *Rig Veda*, that describes planetary placements to the nakshatras (or lunar mansions) described in Hindu Astrology. The *Rig Veda* describes planetary positions that are at least 6,000 years old. This is one of the arguments for setting the origins of Indian culture and Indian astrology as far back as some authorities do.

How to Understand Vedic Texts

There are six Angas or explanatory limbs, to the Vedas: the siksha and vyakarana of Panini, the chhandas of Pingalacharya, the nirukta of Yaksha, the Jyotisha of Garga (Garga is an ancient sage or teacher, and is sometimes referred to as the teacher of Parasara--see above for references to Parasara), and the Kalpas (srauta, grihya, dharma and sulba) belonging to the authorship of various rishis.

Siksha is knowledge of phonetics, dealing with pronunciation and accent. The text of the Vedas is arranged in various forms or Pathas. The pada-patha gives each word its separate form. The Krama-patha connects the word in pairs. Vyakarana is Sanskrit grammar. Panini's books are most famous. Without knowledge of Vyakarana, it is said a person cannot understand the Vedas. Chhandas is meter dealing with prosody.

Nirukta is philology or etymology.

Jyotisha is astronomy and astrology. It deals with the movements of the heavenly bodies, planets, etc., and their influence in human affairs. It includes earthly signs like Nimhita (omens) and the ability to read different parts of the body (palmistry is the most commonly used, but there are others.) (See above.)

Kalpa is the method of ritual. The Srauta sutras (from the *Yajur Veda* see above) which explain the ritual of sacrifices belong to Kalpa. The Sulba Sutras, which treat of the measurements which are necessary for laying out the sacrificial areas, also belong to Kalpa. The Grihya Sutras which concern domestic life, and the Dharma Sutras which deal with ethics, customs and laws, also belong to kalpa.

There are many texts that explore the philosophy of Jyotish, but its basic philosophy is based on Sankhya (*see above-some consider this the oldest system of philosophy in the world*)⁷, a system of thought that categorizes states of existence between spirit and matter. This is as we saw above, the foundation for the decline of the soul into matter and its progress back to Brahman).

Interestingly enough, Sankhya's complementary discipline is Yoga, which is the process by which we merge again with the divine, while still retaining our identities, as above. Indian philosophy is heavily steeped in the belief in reincarnation, and the astrology chart is seen as an indicator of how far away from, or how close to reunion with God the soul is. (There are six darshans or viewpoints in Hinduism, set into three pairs—Nyaya (logic) and Vaisheshika (discrimination); Samkhya (categorization) and Yoga (Union) and Purva Mimamsa (religious and spiritual ritual) and Vedanta (or the elimination of

boundaries between the divine and the human) This is certainly not the only use of Jyotisha, but ease of life is considered the result of past life actions, which lead to reward or suffering. The spiritual aspect to these life events depends on how we deal with the good and bad that life hands us—or that we hand ourselves! Also, the concept of the level of karma a person must face becomes important. Sankhya is considered to be ruled by the Moon (as will be discussed later) and the Moon is probably the most important heavenly body in Jyotisha--the Moon is our mind through which we sense and experience the world and the sensations that the Moon brings keep us reincarnating--and experiencing life in this world.

TYPES OF KARMA

Karma is divided into four primary categories: (1) sanchita, (2) prarabdha, (3) kriyamana, and (4) agama. Sanchita and prarabdha karma can be generally understood as the unchangeable fate or destiny of the individual, with kriyamana and agama karma reflecting the person's free will or choice. The following is a basic description of each type of karma.

- Sanchita can be defined as one's collective karma from all past incarnations. Sanchita basically means "heaped together" and reflects the collection of all karmas due to known and unknown actions of the past.
- Prarabdha karma is the specific karmic lessons that an individual is ready to experience in this lifetime. Thus, it is only a portion of the collective sanchita karma and may be experienced as a person's destiny or fate in the present incarnation.
- Kriyamana karma is created by our current actions in this lifetime. It can be thought of as our free will or effort that we are exerting now. It is our daily behavior and personal actions. As the great Jyotishi, Swami Sri Yukteswar stated, "The first lesson on the spiritual path is to learn to behave".
- Agama karmas are created by how we envision the future. They are the new actions that are contemplated as you plan your work as a result of personal insight.

Dates of the development of these ideas is very uncertain. There is certainly a wideThe difficulty we have in validating dates probably has its roots in two factors, one historical and one cultural—the historical part comes to a certain extent from the rise in Buddhism in India. Buddhism did not particularly welcome astrology (if the moderate path is the path, what need do we have of rituals or even an analysis of destiny—whatever astrology was practiced before 400 BCE is not in evidence), and we may have a cultural manifestation as well. Many Brahmins (who were the astrologers in ancient days) allegedly passed along this knowledge orally, and it may be that this knowledge was only written down in the late Hellenistic era—but this is speculation. However, many of the Puranas and other classical texts, are, to this day in India, transmitted orally even though classical texts are now written down The main point here is that, it is quite impossible at this point in time, to set an exact date.

It is impossible to tell whether the books written in the first 500 years of the current era are a reinvention of the Vedic system, a massive borrowing from

Hellenistic astrology, or something else. Certain revered classics, like *Brihat Parasara Hora Sastra* place such a range of techniques together that the book has the feel of a compendium of knowledge, although it does possess a certain consistency. But these debates will rage on for many years.

Integration of the Soul with the Cosmos

The four aims or goals of Hindu life are: dharma (right action), artha (prosperity), kama (healthy desires), and moksha (spiritual liberation). These aims or goals are related to the twelve houses of the zodiac.

Some authorities believe that early Indian astrology was used for setting times for rituals or propitiate the gods of the Rig Veda (hence an integral part of the interaction of the soul and the cosmos) and that it was later used by kings (a king has karma to unfold!) and perhaps later used for other castes, and was used in both worldly and spiritual pursuits. Around the thirteenth century, worship of the Sun became an important part of Indian religion, and evidence of this practice can be seen at the Temple of Konark. The *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (one of the tools used to speed up evolution), from which one can know past, present and future through meditation on the Sun, and this seems to be an aphorism for astrology.

However, it is extremely important to realize that not all followers of Hinduism believe that the only way to integrate the soul with the cosmos is through astrology. Some groups actively abjure Jyotisha as being irrelevant or distracting to personal development and the process of liberation and that the relationship with the cosmos can be reflected more simply in the concept that the universe repeats itself at all levels.

As a culture, and as a religious tradition, the Sanatana Dharma has always striven to drive humans back to the Brahman from which they came (or to which they aspire.) It is linked directly and intimately to the release of the soul, and the mechanism for understanding this relationship, is really, in humanity's connection with the universe.

1 <http://www.advaita-vedanta.org/avhp/sankara-life.html>; Subramuniyaswami, Satguru Sivaya, *Dancing with Siva*, pp. 19-29; http://www.hinduism.co.za/hindu_sects.htm

2 Subramuniyaswami, Satguru Sivaya, *Dancing with Siva*, p. 69, 785

3 Viswanathan, Ed. *Am I a Hindu?* p. 116.

4 Gomes, Gary "Mars, The Mighty Malefic" (attached)

5 Source of planetary avatar placements: Parasara, *Brihat Parasara Hora Sastra*, pp. 1-10, explanations by author.

6 Viswanathan, Ed. *Am I a Hindu?* Pp. 22-37, 72-76

1. *Brihat Parasara Hora Sastra* (either the Santhanam or Sharma translations are fine; the differences between the two are pretty minimal
Publisher: South Asia Books; 2nd edition (January 1, 1997)
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