

## Admission test for astrology

The editorial 'The astrology fallout' (*Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **80**, 1085–1086) is unusually soft, giving a long rope to UGC's misadventure. UGC or the protagonists of 'astrological science' may well be reminded that it had taken two-thousand years for mankind to arrive at the definition of science as against the detractors and confounders who all claim that what they did or do is 'science' by labelling it with nomenclatures like Gyan, Vigyan, Sastra or Vigyanasastra. In their enthusiasm to portray themselves as scientifically-oriented, all pseudo-scientific, unscientific and non-scientific propositions were put forward for both honest and dishonest objectives. One step forward and three steps backward was the pace of science due to the said deterrents. That is how one can understand the birth of the Pythagoras theorem in 500 BC and the geocen-

tric theory continuing to dominate the 'scientific' thinkers up to the 17th century AD. The heliocentric theoreticians were hounded and silenced till the dawn of 'Copernicus, Galileo, Newton phase' in the 17th century. When earth was thought to be the centre of the planetary system and not even believed to be round till a few centuries earlier, where is the wonder in believing that the lives of the creatures on earth are modulated by planetary motions and placements? Belief... that is good... faith ... that is better. But science is a different language, a different method, a different 'religion of reason', as J. D. Bernal in his *History of Science* proclaimed at length. The method of science is based on impersonal truths and universal validity, with verification and possible negation as and when the new facts come in, according to science philoso-

phers like Kuhn and Popper. To deviate is a sacrilege for science all over the world.

Hence the oversensitive reaction of scientists towards aspects of astrology, palmistry, tantrik practices, etc. Half truths, untruths and mere dreams might well be needed for humanity as social factors to overcome fear, insecurity, uncertainty and natural disaster before a real and rational world is built up for sustainable happiness of the peoples of the world. To conclude, any person or institution will be doing injustice if every faith is roped into the scientific arena, much less an institution like UGC, the backbone of Indian scientific research and development.

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## Astrological education

That astrology is no legitimate science of traditional type has been pointed out by several scientists in recent issues of *Current Science*. Nevertheless, it must be accepted that since medieval times, astrology continues to provide a psychological prop to many human beings all over the world. Daily columns in newspapers/magazines and TV programmes the world over are a testimony thereof. The matrimonial alliances in many Hindu families, including those of some rational scientists, take place only if the associated zodiac signs and *rasis* match favourably. And of course, astrology is a life-line of hope for most of our politicians.

If some communities are willing to pay to acquire astrological knowledge, an academic institution committed to serve the community to provide liberal and universal knowledge has a good case to introduce astrology as a social science course. But if the meagre public funds meant for education to create and

nurture intellectual power of the country are diverted to satisfy the whims of some, it tantamounts to a criminal misuse of public funds.

Anguish and horror have been expressed by a number of scientists and newspapers on the misconceived efforts of the University Grants Commission (UGC) to bait universities with professorial posts to introduce courses on astrology as a part of traditional science curricula. The Chairman and the Members of UGC appear to have turned deaf ears to the voices of protest and rationality. After all, when some chairmen of our apex bodies could not differentiate between an IIT and ITI (and very likely, also between astronomy and astrology), we should not expect any respect for the vanishing scientific temper. Regrettably, our numerous (six, on the last count) science academies function more like dignified clubs and are very content with having little or no voice in the scientific affairs of the country. So

there is little to expect from the academies.

Is there any hope of bringing UGC to a rational discussion on the subject? Should the universities, that have been lured into offering such courses, not explain to their own faculties the rationale behind the decision? Experience in our country shows that protests from individuals outside the power circle will have no effect on any of our systems. What is needed is an organized proactive group effort to confront the issue in a visible manner. Organizations such as the Society for Scientific Values, have a challenge cut out for them. It is time that the scientists who cherish values stand up and be counted.

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