

A time for demystification of astrology

This is in line with the various responses for and against the introduction of astrology as a course. I feel that all the hue and cry raised will pave the way for unfolding of truth since 'to believe with certainty we must begin by doubting' – Stanislaus. But it would be more relevant if all the views against astrology could be rejected based upon scientific investigations. The available results do not confirm either in favour or against these disciplines. French psychologists like Michel and Françoise have demonstrated a surprising correspondence between personality and planetary position at birth. Other studies could not establish such a relationship for those who have committed suicide, crime, etc. Another study that has been found incredible is that of Kepler who tried to relate the seven planets to the seven notes in music. Chiero the world famous seer quotes, 'human body has the same water content like the sea and brain has more water content. While we can see the influence of moon on the sea why not we accept the fact that it may also influence the behaviour and thoughts of humans'. Chiero visited the Somnath temple in India and has thanked the purohiths for permitting him to peruse the available materials before he mastered astrology and palmistry.

Science admits that there is a tremendous cosmic influence on the behaviour

of various animals and calls the study as cosmobiology and chronobiology. Science has accepted the various lunar rhythms. In animals the behaviour is influenced, in human beings the thoughts are influenced, which in turn should shape the happenings. In USA, a survey was made to find out how the people think about astrology. One-third of the people believed, another one-third saw predictions in papers and another one-third did not believe in astrology at all, which made *New York Times* publish in its 13 August 1977 issue that many in western countries believed in astrology. Subsequently, a leading American magazine *Humanist* published objections to astrology signed by 186 leading scientists, including astrophysicists, astronomers and 18 Nobel laureates which was followed by another letter published in an astrological magazine in support of astrology, signed by 187 academicians. Such contradictions continue to prevail since time immemorial. While Plato and Aristotle believed that this world is inescapably linked to the motions of the world above, people like Lucretius and Cicero did not.

We know the response received by Darwin when the evolution theory was put forth and even now some of my students studying life science do not believe in Darwin's concept. When

Wegner put forward the continental drift theory again, there was stiff opposition and at that time there was no mechanism to prove the same. In a meeting 100 professors in Germany objected to Einstein's theory. Einstein said, 'If I were wrong, one professor would have been enough'. So if astrology were folklore and superstition why not subject it to scientific analysis and put this to rest once for all. Will this not be a beginning in that direction? Alternatively if there is any truth about a baby predisposed to develop a particular type of personality due to planetary disposition it will revolutionize psychology and other sciences. In the words of Spencer, 'there is no bar to knowledge greater than contempt prior to examination'. Therefore let us hail this as an official opportunity to demystify this field and save the gullible population, both literate and illiterate, from the clutches of the so-called experts in the field.

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A note on Jyotir-vigyan

Prior to the 17th century, astrology was of two kinds: natural and judicial (see Oxford English Dictionary). The former dealt with the calculations of natural phenomena, while influences of planets and stars upon human affairs belonged to the latter. Emergence of astronomy as a science since then limited astrology to judicial astrology only. Obviously, astrology is not science.

In India, *jyotish* is one of the six *vedangas*. Origin of the basic premises is traced to *Vedas*, and allegorically *jyotish* represents the eyes of the *Ved*

Purush. The key concept of *jyoti* is very profound: it represents the primaevial light of Brahma. There are three manifestations of this *jyoti: ut, uttar* and *uttam* belonging to *prithvi, antarksha* and *dhyu lokas* respectively. Vigyan is transcendental knowledge, i.e. beyond the sensorial experiences (*indriyaateet*). Thus the term Vedic astrology or Vedic science does not make sense. Of course, the knowledge of the materialistic world is also retained in *Vedas* as we learn from *Rigved*. *Jyotir-vigyan* is founded on the recognition of the supreme con-

scious *Brahma*, unity of the universe encompassing sentient and non-living beings. All of the living or nonliving beings derive the light from the primaevial *jyoti*, and all events including those belonging to human affairs are placed in relation to the time elapsed since the creation of the universe. No event is isolated or independent in the universe.

Mundane application of this vigyan constitutes the popularly known *jyotish*. Here two aspects have got mixed up: influence of astronomical events and observational correlations of them with

human affairs and natural phenomena on earth. A person is believed to be born with the samskaras of past births and vasanas. These are like initial conditions for determining the destiny of the person. Unlike other beings, human beings are endowed with free-will and *purushartha* (see Yoga-Vasishtha). A

person can control vasanas and change the course of the trajectory of the destiny by *purushartha*. The prevalent system of prescribing rituals to change the effect of planets/stars appears to be a crude and vague form of this principle. Rishis – the seers of truth, declare in the Vedas that one's penetration of vision

determines the level of truth one reaches.

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Astrology – a neo-science without utility

One may support the views of K. N. Ganeshiah (*Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **80**, 719) not because there is unscientific burial of Vedic astrology by a large number of scientists (*Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **80**, 1088) in opposing the UGC's move to introduce Vedic astrology in the curriculum of the universities, but because Vedic astrology is probably a systematic knowledge or science. There is the balanced and knowledgeable opinion of V. V. S. Sarma (*Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **80**, 115) too. Whether Vedic astrology is a science and whether it should form a university-study, are two different questions. Most of us have superficial knowledge of astrology and only a few of us have knowledge of the Vedas. Nostradamus, some four hundred years ago used to predict favourable and unfavourable events about people which were generally found to be true. These predictions put him into trouble and he then started making predictions in guarded language in the form of verses about the persons, country and time. It has not been an easy matter to make correct and precise interpretations of these French verses. One interpretation made by Hiranmaya Kirlekar (?) in *Observer* in October 1986, said that Communism will be wiped out by 1991. I refused to believe it then and all of us considered this to be an impossibility at that time. However, now we know what happened ultimately and to what extent. There are numerous instances from our daily life when we are eager to know the future events with the help of astrology, and thereby ascertain whether the predictions are true or not. The main reason for the predictions not being true is

insufficient knowledge of astrology, imprecise calculations and wrong interpretations. There is nothing wrong in getting a horoscope made at the time of birth of a child in the family. There is optimistic justification in knowing the auspicious moment for starting or doing some important work, which is equivalent to knowing the mood of one's boss to get anything done. If we fail to get the work done by the boss, surely it is our failure to read his/her mood correctly.

In all probability, astrology may be a science, much more difficult to understand and practise than physics and mathematics. It may not be as exact and precise as known sciences but it is a systematic knowledge very similar to science. It may also not have cause and effect relationship as rigorous as in chemistry and physics. The limiting factors in astrology are much more than in conventional sciences. Let it be known as neo-science. If several scientists including a few Nobel Laureates have given a statement in mid-1970 that astrology is not a science (Narlikar, J., *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 14 May 2001), that is not the last word or the end of a story or phenomenon. Their contention is based on western philosophy with no history or ancient background.

Do we not have an open mind as scientists to know more about them and to find out the truth?

Even though one may possess sufficient knowledge of astrology, it requires lot of wisdom, intuition and experience to make predictions accurately and appropriately. One must be able to make

precise calculations about the influence of a planet and of the stars on a person's life. It is something like the practice of homeopathy which is more difficult than allopathy or ayurveda. There may be several homeopathic medicines for a complaint, but only an experienced practitioner knows what particular symptom is most important to be given attention to, for prescribing the medicine.

Astrology may or may not be a science, but the big question is, why should we study it? To be able to know the future? How does knowing the future help us? Not in any way. On the other hand, it creates confusion. The best thing is to do one's duty according to the *karma* theory of *Srimad Bhagavad Geeta* and leave the rest to the Divine.

It is a human weakness to want to know one's future. If astrology is made a part of the curriculum in universities, it lends credibility and respectability to it and to the practice of knowing the future. Thus, the tendency to know future will grow more by what the UGC has already done, and this we have found, is not useful in life. Astrology may be a science or neo-science, but its study would not leave us any wiser and its practice would lead us to more confusion.

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