

Astrology or arrant trash

The author has no arrogant intention to coin such a qualifier for a topic, which is close to the heart of present-day political masters believing in revival of the organized religious practices of bygone days known as astrology and under no circumstances be confused with astronomy. I have picked up this adjective from the article of Swami Vivekananda entitled 'Man the makers of his destiny'. He asserts in this article 'I have seen some astrologers who predicted wonderful things, but I have no reason to believe they predicted them only from the stars or anything of the sort. In many cases it is simply mind reading. Sometimes wonderful predictions are made, but in many cases it is *arrant trash*'.

I feel serious academics are known for asking serious questions with novel solutions and need to ponder over the ailing state of our socio-political life with the same degree of seriousness and novelty. It is in this background that I would like to quote the following comments of Roger Penrose in his famous book *Shadows of the Mind*, Vintage, 1995 'Excessive religious fervour or nationalism or separate ethnic interests or mere linguistic or cultural differences or the self-seeking interests of particular demagogues (the enlightened men in the corridors of power in Indian context-emphasis added) may result in continuing unrest... . Oppressively authoritarian regimes still subjugate their peoples, keeping them in check by the use of death squad and torture'. Readers may be aware that Penrose is an outstanding and serious scientist from Oxford and is known for subtle observations on issues of common interest with impeccable distinction. It is also imperative on our part too therefore to carefully scrutinize the anti-science and excessive organized religious overtones in our socio-political life in view of assertion of Roger Penrose. Unfortunately, we have unscientific temper all around and we have never seen in the recent past any intellectual upsurge as part of our socio-political life. Owing to this, we do not have a philosophy for better intellectual pursuits without systematic confusion.

The entire gamut of tradition of science which human history has experienced since the dawn of civilization can fall into the realm of any of the three categories (a) Science having objectivity (b) Science where objectivity cannot be ensured at a given stage of development and (c) Anti/Pseudo-science. Such a classification has become crisper with the advent of modern tools and philosophy of science (cf. *Physical Science: An Inquiry Approach* by Monroe and Jackson, Canfield Press, 1977). It can be easily seen through a conscious journey into the history of science that 'a' and 'b' as time passes interacts and many elements of 'b' become part of 'a' and we happen to unravel a part of mystery of nature. The cardinality of 'b' is of course as vast as those of the ever expanding universe. Thus as we advance in our scientific endeavours, we discover that we have to learn more and more to unravel truth objectively – a truly romantic experience of doing science which makes all the learners humble as they attain a higher level of scholarship. This is the motivation for all of us to get involved in the pursuit of learning so as to ensure time-tested method of doing science hopefully untouched by the power mongers. 'c' under no circumstances can lie in either of the two domains mentioned above.

The divination is in the core of all the knowledge that we have in astrology. The analogy being given pertains to the motion of planets owing to divine energy with those of divine creations including human beings. The so-called logical deduction of the above therefore leads that planetary positions do affect the fate of individuals and all anti-scientific prescription to alter the above would change the fate of millions of deprived people. I really feel pity for the social scientists, who think that good governance could alleviate poverty and is capable of providing better quality of life! Unfortunately, if we look objectively around, then we realize that mere chanting of mantras over the years could neither help mobilize food for the half a billion population nor could help in making a super highway! As clarified earlier, we keep mixing the

ancient practices of astronomical calculations of planetary positions with that of astrology. However, revival of the former based on pre-historic traditions would definitely lead to anticipatory plagiarism (a term whose explanation has been given in Barrow's classic work entitled 'Theories of everything') and if at all we are serious about unravelling the mystery of the universe, we need to create better infrastructures to produce 'Chandrasekhars' on the land of our beloved nation. Such effort will help the process of learning in a more objective way without any fear of anticipatory plagiarism. Having made the submission on the above we revert back to astrology and investigate the fundamental axiom mentioned earlier. The fundamental axiom in the interpretation of astrology relies on the fact that divine energy is manifested in the movements of the sun and planets and human being – a direct creation of God should bear a correlation between the motions of celestial bodies and his/her fate. Are we a direct creation of GOD? Then what happens to our objective investigation of the process of evolution, role of unity and struggle both from within and outside since the formation of protoplasm! Thus we have two obvious options. These pertain to (a) we accept the axiom involved in astrological prediction and discard the teaching of theory of evolution or any other branch of learning, which relies on objectivity and reproducibility of experimental observations (to fall exactly in line) and (b) we care for the sacrifices made by those who established the latter system of scientific discourse. We need to take a crystal clear position and should not follow the inconsistent approach mentioned in the beginning. This is the reason why burial of anti-science by contrast is rational (Cf. Ganeshiah, *Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **80**, 719).

It will not be out of place to mention here that we had many liberal idealists like Gandhiji and Vivekanandaji who always discouraged practices, which reduce the nation to a subservient or weak one. They wanted democratic India to be governed by masters who

have strong will power to fight for a better quality of life with ability to give good governance. Our masters have every right to look for help from supernatural power. Vivekananda has advised the following for them 'if a star disturbs my life, it would not be worth a cent. You will find that astrology and

all these mystical things are generally signs of a weak mind; therefore as soon as they are becoming prominent in our minds, we should see a physician, take good food and rest'. I think many wise men have now time to rest. For those who are still unwise and deprived of opportunities, it is high time that they

strive and assert their presence for democracy, scientific temper and freedom.

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Whipping astrology – a science crime

I find it more disturbing now to read the responses¹⁻⁷ to my letter on astrology (*Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **80**). More disturbing because most responses seem to attribute to my article issues that I do not subscribe to, and in the process there is continued whipping of astrology on the wrong side. Whether or not astrology can predict (and I have never vouched on this in my article but the whipholders seem to have more confidence than I have in its predictive power!), my prediction has come to be very true. I had written that any appeal for a serious and an unbiased study of the ancient Indian scientific developments will be 'straight-away rejected as an useless rambling'. The lynching mob has done exactly that¹. They write: 'We do not want to waste our time... in rebutting point by point the long *rambling* letter'. Happily enough, irrespective of the mode in which astrology will be studied, a few science conformists seem to agree that it can be studied as arts and history⁵⁻⁷. Again, a predicted move of the conformists known for their sluggish change.

Now to more serious issues: I find that there are three major issues raised in the rejoinders. One by one to them.

- It has been argued that when UGC is constrained by the resources for higher education, introducing astrology is an inappropriate step and 'investing public money or resources on (such) activities... is very unwise and wasteful'³. I guess the Indian scientific community in general has not got the ethical strength to make such suggestions. Let me recall the statistics by Arunachalam on the resources⁸, both human and financial, invested in the

research institutes. He shows that our efforts in medical research are more directed towards the priorities determined by the western health problems and that the most serious Indian diseases are almost neglected. Whom are we questioning on the wisdom of spending? Now the 'serious scientists' may turn to defend by bringing in the freedom for science – and that has been my argument as well in imparting education.

- It has been argued that introduction of astrology is not appropriate as science but fine as arts⁵⁻⁷! I find it funny. For me there are only two categories: Sensible information base and nonsense. It is immaterial whether or not the good knowledge base is arts or science. In fact today we have scientific principles applied to distinguish between the patterns of writing by Shakespeare and those by others. History that was once an arts subject is almost subjected to scientific methodology especially in archeology-based history. Science was once taught as natural philosophy. What do we consider today the subject of philosophy and psychology as sciences or arts? I urge these authors to ask their kids in primary, middle, and high schools about the subjects they are studying: **Moral Sciences, Social Sciences, Political Sciences...!!** Why did all these scientists not raise any voice against the introduction of these subjects? Because they all came directly from the West as a teaching package to our kids?

In my view the information *per se* does not make it science or arts. Info is info

irrespective of these stigmas but, science differs from the rest in the methodology applied to test the validity of, and or, to arrive at the knowledge. Therefore, instead of suggesting a full stop for teaching astrology let us propose the ways and clauses to be followed while teaching it.

- All the authors of the rejoinders appear to be setting a crow – that I believe in astrological predictions and, are rejoicing in shooting it down. This is evident for example from the challenge that Lakshmana Rao⁴ offers, using statistics from Hiroshima. This unfortunate mix up seems to be due to an unwarranted hurry in burying astrology. In fact I have never stated in my article that we should study astrology for its predictions; I also oppose UGC on this ground because they seem to use this as one of the arguments. But throwing away the baby with the bathwater is no solution. My appeal has been to consider the possibilities that these subjects have issues different from what the scientifically trained eyes can see, especially because these knowledge-bases have accumulated in a format different from the way we practice science⁹.

There are a few specific issues and examples the rejoinders raise and I wish to respond to them equally specifically:

- M. R. N. Murthy wonders if a self-respecting scientist can test the efficacy of applying goat intestine mix to cure a skin disease. I am rather confused as to what he refers to here. Is it the ugliness of the sight of