



ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND COSMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF INDIAN ASTROLOGY

Audrius Beinorius

Center of Oriental Studies, Vilnius University, Lithuania

(audrius.beinorius@oc.vu.lt)

ABSTRACT

In India, since their inception, astronomy and astrology have operated concurrently and in complementary fashion, providing a grammar and syntax for a single semantic universe. In the present paper, an attempt is made to reveal the epistemological and cosmological foundations of Indian astrology and divination practices, using early astrological Sanskrit sources and historical and textual-hermeneutical methodology. According to traditional Indian sources, the formal cosmological structure is coupled with a rich mythological tradition in order to support a living, meaning-filled cosmos. This cosmos was relevant above all to the terrestrial world, especially to the proper functioning of ancient Aryan society. Astrological practices cannot be differentiated from other social practices on the basis of their symbolic exchange or their rhetorical powers. The concept of “likeness” (*sādrśya*) is fundamental to the operation of the Indian astral sciences. Therefore, to know the grammar and the syntax of the heavens – the unfolding chronology, the modulations of meaning – was essential for Indians if the order of the world and of society was to be maintained.

KEYWORDS: astrology, astronomy, divination, time, ancient India, philosophy, cosmology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian cultural history, in all its diversity, attests to our enduring attention to the sky and our perennial inclination to find meaning in the heavens. There exist, within and outside of India, some 100,000 manuscripts on various aspects of Indian traditional astral sciences (*jyotiḥśāstra*). At the same time, scholarship still suffers from embarrassment about taking serious interest in the history of traditional divination systems. Despite the efforts of classical philologists and historians of Indian religion and science since the end of the nineteenth century, such as Johan Hendrik Kern, Albrecht Weber, and George Thibaut, to preserve and publish the long-neglected astrological Sanskrit texts and to emphasize their autonomous conceptual value, the astrological texts and astrological practices are still largely ignored by the mainstream of Western Indologists.

For a long time the notion of “pseudosciences” has hindered historical investigations of phenomena like astrology and other forms of divination. Understanding that the knowledge is rooted in social practice changes the way one writes the history of science. According to Richard Lemay, “Hence the effort to understand medieval attitudes toward astrology by applying to this science our contemporary paradigm (to use Kuhn’s convenient term) – the usual approach to the problem – seems to foreclose in advance all avenues leading to the medieval mind, to its structural framework, and to the contents of its own different paradigm”. (Lemay 1987: 58) Tamsyn Barton rightly argues that the modern opposition between rational science (*τεχνή*) and divination (*μαντική*) is a fundamentally unhelpful antithesis, which runs the risk of pandering to an anachronistic and, indeed, idealistic notion of science, because this was a period in which boundaries between science and divination were fluid and negotiable, and tradition itself was an important source of legitimating of knowledge (Barton 1994 : 15).

It seems that the study of the earlier paradigms is possible through patient and open-minded examination of texts and their context. However, historians of science are perhaps the only scholars who have looked at astrological practice, and they have normally been concerned only with what they could learn about contemporary mathematics or astronomy, not with astrology itself, let alone with setting it in its social or even intellectual context.

Now, mainly due to the historical works of the late professor David Pingree and his immense project, *Census of the Exact Sciences in Sanskrit* (Pingree 1994), the importance of medieval astrological texts for the history of culture and the history of ideas is much more fully appreciated. In his project, Pingree provided a preliminary explanation and organization of the vast body of Sanskrit and Sanskrit-influenced literature devoted to astronomy, mathematics, astrology and divination, together with brief bibliographical information concerning the treatises and their authors. Without this unique encyclopedia, any serious attempt in the field of traditional Indian astrosciences would nowadays be next to impossible.

2. SOURCES OF INDIAN ASTROLOGY

Jyotiḥśāstra (“science of lights”) was the branch of Indian sacred knowledge (*scientia sacra*) devoted to the study and interpretation of the heavens. I am using here the expression and definition of the sacred science provided by Seyyed Hosein Nasr. According to Nasr, *scientia sacra* is metaphysics as the ultimate science of the Real and lies at the heart of each tradition, and as the center of that circle which encompasses and defines tradition, is not a purely human knowledge lying outside of the sacred precinct of the various traditions. “The formal language used for the expression of *scientia sacra*, and in fact nearly the whole spectrum of traditional teachings, is that of symbolism” (Nasr 1981 : 131-153). Thus *jyotiṣa vedāṅga* is known in India to be one of the six auxiliary sciences (*āṅgas*) of the

Vedas. The *jyotiṣavedāṅga* is a general name referring to the treatises called the *Rgveda Jyotiṣa* (RJ), the *Yajurveda Jyotiṣa* (YJ) and the *Atharvaveda Jyotiṣa* (AJ). A detailed comparative table of corresponding verses in these oldest treatises of *jyotiṣavedāṅga* is provided by Shankar Balakrishna Dikshit (Dikshit 1931).



Illustration 1. *Jyotiṣakalpadrūma*, the traditional representation of the magic tree of *jyotiṣa*, with its Vedic, Tantric and Purāṇic roots, three main branches (*saṃhitā*-divination, *horā*-astrology, *sidhantā*-mathematics, astronomical calculations) and all leaves-subjects of *jyotiṣa* (*viśayā*, *granthā*). From *Tājikanīlakaṅṭhī*, beginning of twentieth century.

The first two treatises are ascribed to the sage Lagadha (around 400 BC), while the last one is anonymous. According to the medieval Indian astrological treatises, *jyotiṣavedāṅga* was originally revealed by the *prathama muni* (first seer) god Brahma and promulgated by the eighteen mythological sages (Pingree 1981 : 1). According to the *Matsyapurāṇa*, the authority of seers (*rṣis*) is due to their knowledge of the stars (*tārakādinidarśibhiḥ*). They are also said to dwell in, or even to become, celestial bodies, for they became gods because of their religious action (*karmadeva*) (*vedā hi yajñārthamabhipravṛttaḥ kālā anupuroyā vihi-*

tāśca yajñāḥ - Matsyapurāṇa, 142.22; 127.40-41.)

The purpose of this science was to provide Vedic priests with a means of computing the times for which the performances of sacrifices are prescribed, primarily new and full moons. In the following verse, the purpose of the *jyotiṣavedāṅga* is clearly stated:

“The Vedas arose for the purpose of use in sacrifices; sacrifices are enjoined according to the order of times; therefore, he who knows *Jyotiṣa* knows sacrifices. Just as a tuft of hair stands on the head of peacocks or a jewel in the heads of cobras, so astronomical calculations (*gaṇita*) stand at the head of all the sciences that are spoken of as *vedāṅga*” (*vedā hi yajñārthamabhipravṛttaḥ kālā anupuroyā vihitāśca yajñāḥ, tasmādidam kālāvidhāna śāstram ye jyotiṣam veda sa veda yajñān. - Rgveda Jyotiṣa, 35 Yajurveda Jyotiṣa*).

After quoting the verse given above in his commentary on *Brhājñātaka* famous astronomer of 9-10th centuries Bhaṭṭotpala explains the role of astrology among other sacred Vedic sciences by stating:

“Now, how is it proven that astrology is *Vedāṅga*? It is *Vedāṅga* because auspicious times are described in terms of lunar and solar eclipses, the sun’s entry into a sign of the zodiac, and [calculations] of *vyatipāta* (particular astronomical conjunctions of planets), *gajacchāya* (position of a particular constellation, *tithi* (lunar days), etc; because specific times are prescribed for the sacrifices, and because times are laid down for various other activities described in the *Śrutis* (the sacred, revealed Hindu texts), *Smṛtis* (texts of the Hindu customary law) and *Purāṇas* (the mytho-historical Hindu narratives).” (II.I.2.)

This means that, according to Bhaṭṭotpala, astrology (*phālita-jyotiṣa*) depends strongly on astronomy (*gaṇita-jyotiṣa*). In the *Pāṇinīya Śikṣā*, the most ancient work on Indo-Aryan phonetic ascribed to sage *Pāṇini* (4th century BC), the science of the movements of heavenly bodies is said to be the eye of the Veda (*Śikṣā*, 41-42). This

shows that the words *jyotiṣa* and *gaṇita* are used as synonyms in the *jyotiṣavedāṅga*.

2. SPACE AND TIME

The famous phenomenologist of religions, Mircea Eliade, was one of the first scholars to respect the organic integrity of astral mythologies. He demonstrated the significance of celestial archetypes in contributing to the unity and cohesiveness of the cosmological vision imbedded within the cultural fabric. He has also examined the ontological conceptions that underlie the celestial archetypes that permit and facilitate, for traditional societies, a necessary intercourse between the conditioned and the transcendental (Eliade 1974 : 6-11).

Space and time are two of the primary categories of perception that cosmologies address. All calendrical systems mark space as well as time. Eliade has pointed out that the archetypes of archaic cultures belong to a "cosmic time" beyond temporality. The cosmos is homologous to cosmic time:

"For just as the cosmos is the archetype of all creation, cosmic time, which the cosmogony brings forth, is the paradigmatic model for all other times – that is, for the time specifically belonging to the various categories of existing things" (Eliade 1963 : 141).

In the context of Indian philosophy, the primary causality of time was often, though not universally, accepted. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* gives an account of the *Sāṃkhya*, one of the six major Indian philosophical systems (*darśanas*), in which time (*kāla*) is equivalent to God because, like God, time causes the three *guṇas* – the primary quantitative components of existence – to lose their equilibrium and combine (Dasgupta 1975 4 : 25, 47). From this perspective, time becomes the primary cause and catalyst of a cosmos that unfolds in accordance with its infinite potential for permutation.

Indian astronomers, however, believed that time itself was generated by the motions of the planets. The complex internal mechanics of the celestial system, marked largely by continuity and regularity of the

planetary movements, constitute a perfect image of cosmic time made manifest. In the *Kālasamuddeśa* of his *Vākyapadīya*, Bhartṛhari, the famous seventh-century Indian grammarian, cites this same opinion in the course of his discussion on the astronomical computation of time: "Furthermore, the knowers of time regard time as the motion of the sun, planets, and constellations, distinguished by their different revolutions." (*ādityagrahanakṣatra pariśpandam athāpare, bhinnam āvṛttibhedena kālaṃ kālavidō viduḥ. - Vākyapadīya, 3.9.76*). According to Bhartṛhari, the divisions and designations of time are generated from a single, undifferentiated time by natural events and human activity, which condition the temporal dimension.

But time in India has never been merely quantitative, that is, limited to the measurement of intervals within any temporal typology, be it solar time, lunar time, seasonal activity, ritual cycles, etc. Time in India is preeminently qualitative. In other words, time, in its differentiated state, possesses meaning – as diverse as the periodicity of time itself. Time, then, is a matter of both natural and moral fact. It is within this conceptual framework, also, that theories of *karma* and transmigration seek to explain both the continuity and the transformation of meaning within human existence. Determining the nature of a particular time and acting accordingly are crucial if one is to live in harmony with the cosmos and within society.

Through the language of myths and symbols, the rhythms and structures of the world reveal themselves to man, although "in cipher". Using Clifford Geertz's notion of a "cultural system", a notion from the discipline of anthropology, the need for a terminology that respects the context in which symbolic meaning – the life of cultural continuity – is created and sustained (Geertz 1973, chapters 4 and 5). Astrology and divination are cultural systems that use symbolic language to decipher those rhythms and structures. Concerning the practice of divination, Mircea Eliade comments:

“All the techniques of divination pursued the discovery of ‘signs’, whose hidden meanings were interpreted in accordance with certain traditional rules. The world, then, revealed itself to be structured and governed by laws. If the signs were deciphered, the future could be known; in other words, time was “mastered” [...]” (Eliade 1978: 83)

Similarly, astrology seeks to understand and interpret a symbolic language of signs in the rhythms of time. The astrological practitioner utilizes the stars as cipher. Bhartṛhari states that: “The stars, which, individually, have the names of constellations, are simply signs for the transformations of the elements that follow the sources of time” (*mātrānām pariṇāmā ye kālavṛtṭyanuṣāyinaḥ, nakṣatrākhyā prthak teṣu cihnamātraṃ tu tārakāḥ. - Vākyapadīya* 3.9.44).

Therefore, by knowing the meaning of astrological “signs,” the astrologer can know, and in some sense even manipulate, the existential transformations to which they refer. There is, in this cosmology, an explicit synchronicity of “sign” and event, and an implicit affinity between simultaneity and meaning, to use the expression of the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (Jung 1955).

The symbolic, multivalent language of the astrological system does provide the astrologer with a kind of calculus for interpretation and mediation; through this language, the astrologer articulates a particular life-pattern and circumstances for his client and/or whole country.

The astrologer’s task, then, is not so much to measure the lapse of time, but to mark and classify the qualitative modalities in terms of which time manifests itself in human experience. The doctrine of *punarjanma* (reincarnation) was the conceptual locus through which the astrological system could be seen to operate, both generating and prefiguring life experience as conditioned by the karmic residues (*karmāśaya*) of previous existences. In turn, the astrological system, in its representational and effective operation, made individual and group experience intelligible in terms of

karma. The same could be said for the culturally constitutive category of *dharma*.



Illustration 2. A court astrologer horoscope painting, Gujarat, 1750 AD from Swami Sivapriyananda, *Astrology and Religion in Indian Art*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1990.

The astrological system as a celestial icon was seen not only as the divinely regulated image of *sanatana dharma* (eternal order), but also as an image capable of signifying the *svadharmā* (individual order) of an individual, a group, or event, for any point in time – a template for existence and activity in Hindu culture. The integration of the astrological practice, and particularly of natal (*jātaka*) astrology, into Indian culture is therefore highly understandable: Astrology integrated the individual’s experience with an envisaged cosmic order through the cultural categories of *karma* and *dharma*, and provided the means for the amelioration of disharmonious experience.

3. EPISTEMOLOGY AND COSMOLOGY OF INDIAN ASTROLOGY

Thus, the celestial world is regarded in India as a divinely regulated icon of cosmic order (*ṛta*) and astrological metaphor that

encodes cosmic order and proceeds to translate that order into a continuous, multidimensional, phenomenal expression of eternity. The symbolic language of astrology deciphers the synchronic rhythms portrayed in the celestial world, and it articulates the teleology of these rhythms in a narrative of emergent diachronic experience, providing temporal organization and a “trajectory of events” (Friedman 1986 : 327). Astrological symbols are woven into a complex system of mutual implication and form, the apparatus by which the teleology of events and circumstances is deciphered. Victor Turner has shown that symbols, both as sensorily perceptible vehicles and as a set of “meanings”, essentially are involved in the multiple variability of the people who employ them; symbols associated with human interests, purposes, and aspirations, individual and collective, take on the character of dynamic semantic systems (Turner 1979 : 13-14).

Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff also suggests that “symbolic images are always seen as chains of analogies”. Different cultural systems within a society therefore gain access to common themata by the operation of analogical imagination (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1982: 170). The resultant mutual implication of diverse levels of cultural discourse permits the incorporation of individual experience into semantically charged patterns operative within Hindu society. The polysemantic symbols of Indian astrology serve to relate ontology and cosmology to aesthetics and morality. As Claude Levi-Strauss asserts, “the assimilation of such patterns is the only means of objectifying subjective states” (Levi-Strauss 1963 : 1:171-172). The Indian astrological system accomplishes the process of objectification of cosmic cycles, in part, by locating human experience within a cosmic frame of reference and by orienting human experience away from the accidental and contingent.

This capacity to expand the phenomena of the mundane world into the cosmic realm is, without doubt, analogous to the process by which religions, historically, have legitimized social institutions (Das

1976 : 247-252). Through the operation of analogical imagination, the symbols and structures of the astrological system have referents on several planes of discourse, e.g., physical, psychological, social, mythical, and religious.



Illustration 3. The birth horoscope itself is a piece of art. Astrological horoscope diagram, Rajasthan, Jaipur, 18th century; ink and color on papier, Gujarat, 1750 AD, from Swami Sivapriyananda, *Astrology and Religion in Indian Art*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1990.

An earlier generation of European scholarship assumed, with a rationalistic bias, that astrology represented the consistent application of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (“after this, therefore because of this”), and judged the system to be little more than an antiquated and fallacious epistemology. Indian astrologers were certainly not thought to be engaged in an extended historical project of inference and deduction (*anumāna*) by which their astrological system was conceived, but in fact such a project, individually implemented along heuristic lines – together with the faulty transmission of astrological teachings – probably accounts for the variation in astrological traditions encountered in texts and in practice.

Rather, the Indian astrological system, as a system, implies its own epistemological foundations, which must be understood within the broader context of an Indian cultural and intellectual agenda. The epistemological underpinnings of Indian astrology emerge through the dialectical transactions of the analogical imagination that inform the entire symbolic system of astrology, transactions that, to use the language of Levi-Strauss, “guarantee the convertibility of ideas between different levels of social reality” (Levi-Strauss 1966 : 76). The result is a vitally alive, richly complex cultural system, grounded in myth, imagination, and the exigencies of everyday life, that orients the person within a meaningful and multidimensional order of being. No wonder, therefore, that according to the *Agnipurāṇa* (1212.1), the knowledge of *ḥyotiḥśāstra* - a science which claims nothing less than complete hegemony over the entire permutable network of reality - makes the astrologer in a sense omniscient (*sarvavid*).

Formal cosmological structure, together with a rich mythological tradition, supports a living, meaning-filled cosmos. This cosmos is relevant above all to the human world, and Indian epistemology has ensured this relevance through the concept of “likeness” or “resemblance” (*sādrśya*). The concept of “likeness” (*sādrśya*) is fundamental to the operation of the Indian astrological system. In his seminal astrological text *Yavanajātaka* („The Horoscopy of the Greeks“), probably the oldest known Sanskrit text on horoscopic astrology (written around 270 A. D.), Sphujidhvaja asserts that the mutual interactions (*yoga*) of the planets as they pass through the various signs of the Zodiac are said to be formed in the likeness of shapes (*samsthāna sādrśyākṛta*):

“One sees that objects have various natures and the likeness of their shapes is infinite; these are to be recognized as belonging to the various divisions of the world and having names similar to their likeness of shape. There is a natural acquisition of qualities that arises from association with

[zodiacal] signs and [celestial] embodiments of inherent nature, whose forms are similar to the shapes [of objects]” (*Yavanajātaka* 36.1-4).

Thus, according to Sphujidhvaja, the universe of objects is characterized by various natures inherent in these objects. The names of objects are consonant with the natures inherent in them. There exists an infinity of likeness among objects that pertain to the various divisions of the world, and the names of objects reflect the likenesses among them. Finally, objects in the world naturally acquire the qualities of zodiacal signs and other celestial embodiments and the shapes of those objects. By the way, the application of the principle of resemblance was not limited to India. Western sympathetic magic was grounded on the principle of resemblance. As Michel Foucault suggests, until the end of the sixteenth century, it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made knowledge possible of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them (Foucault 1973 : 17).

The early *Taittīriya brāhmaṇa* (commentary on the Vedas, detailing the proper performance of rituals, 6-8th centuries BC) already had suggested: “The constellations are images of the world” (*yāni vā imāni pṛthivyāścitrāṇi tāni nakṣatrāṇi - Taittīriya brāhmaṇa* I.5.2.2.). The *Yavanajātaka* reverses this relationship:

“There are always an essence, condition, characteristics, and external form similar to its internal qualities and form; existing like a mirror and its image, these are produced not within its own substance but in the world of men” (*antaḥ sadāsyākṛti laksanāṇaṃ /samānasattvasthitiliṅga mūrṭiḥ, bimbānu-bimbapratimāsthito, ayamutpady atītyasvava-sau nrloke. - Yavanajātaka* 28.2).

The world is thus the image of the heavens, and to know the structural components and interactional dynamics of the astrological system - to know the patterns of being as these are continuously generated by this system of meanings - is, through the “correspondence” that a dialectical imagination makes possible, to know the world.

For horoscopic astrology the most essential correspondence between heaven and earth finds its nexus in man, for the human body is constituted as a microcosm of the celestial world. In fact, the principle of likeness or resemblance was essential to the Indian cosmology in which the astrological system developed, beginning with the Cosmic Man (*puruṣa*) of *R̥gveda* (X.90) and the *Upaniṣadic* assertion that one who knows his microcosmic relationship to the universe attains salvation in or through the celestial world.

The *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* (14.1-5) then speaks of the *nakṣatra-puruṣa* ("man of the constellations"), whose body is formed from the twenty-seven lunar mansions. The *Bṛhajjātaka* of Varāhamihira (1.4) describes the *kālapuruṣa* ("man of time"), whose body is composed of the twelve zodiacal signs, beginning with Aries and ending with Pisces, his head and feet, respectively. The analogical operation of the Indian astrological system permits this cosmic man and the human body to be regarded, in the words of Brenda Beck, as "related topological spaces" (Beck 1976 : 241; see also Wayman 1982). As planetary lords pass through the body of the *kālapuruṣa*, the bodies of men are correspondingly affected. The *Yavanajātaka* (51.6) insists that the good or evil influences that reside in the mind (*manas*) as in the body (*tanu*) possess the strengths and weaknesses of their lords (*īśvara*), as the latter are variously conditioned by their passage through the constellations.

Thus, human experience, in its mental, emotional, and physical modalities, is seen to depend on influences from the celestial world; through principles of similitude and correspondence, man is fashioned in the image of the heavens. According to B.S. Friedman, *sādrśya* guaranteed that the terrestrial world, reflecting the order of heaven, could be known and ordered according to principles of similitude and correspondence (Friedman 1986 : 327). The astrological system informed by *sādrśya* comprehends the grammar and syntax of the heavens – the modulations of meaning imaged there

– and validates the interconnectedness of human experience.



Illustration 4. Kalapurusa (Cosmic Person of time) and Nakṣatrapuruṣa (Cosmic Person of lunar constellations), from a manuscript Gujarat, 19th century AD, from Swami Sivapriyananda, *Astrology and Religion in Indian Art*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1990.

To know *jyotiṣa*, therefore, is to know the order of the world, the system that generates and prefigures life experience, as it is conditioned by *karma*. The astrological system thus objectifies human experience and ensures a universe of participation in which the individual and the cosmos are fundamentally relevant to each other. An Indian astrologer is provided with a kind of calculus with which to locate an apparently chaotic and meaningless social and individual situation within an integrated and intelligible web of meanings.

The distinction between unconditioned and conditioned time, or "real" and "human" time, is, as Indian psychologist Sudhir Kakar suggests, reminiscent of the distinction between reality and cosmic illusion (*māyā*). "Human" time, with its fluctuation and periodicity, is therefore only an apparent phenomenon; *samsāra* ("universal flux") is a wordly manifestation of absolute time (Kakar 1978 : 46). It is this view of time that has given rise to the image of *kāla*

("time") as a fearful god of death and inexorable fate.



Illustration 5. Two astrologers/scribes making horoscopes. Above: cats (astrology) playing with balls (celestial bodies). Scroll painting, Rajasthan, 18th century AD, from Swami Sivapriyananda, *Astrology and Religion in Indian Art*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1990.

S. Kakar has emphasized the relevance of the conceptions of time and destiny – the essential dimensions of experience – for an understanding of individual psychology: “The way in which a culture estimates and elaborates ideas of time and destiny provides insight into the psychological organization of its individual members.” (Kakar 1978 : 45) A person lives in a unitary life-world in which numerous influences are naturally active, and he has a destiny that is manifested in the experiential milieu of daily life. The cyclical movements of heavenly bodies produce cyclical patterns of influence on the terrestrial world and on the life of the person. These celestial cycles create a progression of auspicious (*śubha*) and inauspicious (*aśubha*) periods of time. Celestial cycles do not simply mark the passage of a homogenous time; they create fluctuations in the quality of time that in-

fluence the possibilities of human action. Changes in life experience are often expressed in patterns of fluctuation that mark the person’s physical and psychological conditions and also mark the quality of his relationships in his family and community.

The theory of cycles is thus a basic feature of Hindu cosmology, with its accounts of cosmic cycles of creation and destruction, and with the fundamental place of the theory of rebirth (*punarjanma*), in which the life-time of the person is merely one phase in an ongoing cycle of death and rebirth.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The Indian astrological system provides a theory of experiential continuity and accounts, conversely, for *samsara* as personal flux. Capable of an infinite permutation of its symbolic components – a constantly changing celestial icon – the astrological system both generates and prefigures karmic conditions: An individual’s *karma* and *dharma* are reified in the horoscope.

Astrology in its entire operational schema becomes a language that is used not only in constructing a myth of the self but also in connecting such myths to society, thus creating a dialectic of self and society. The very act of choosing and consulting an astrologer or diviner can be considered a rite in itself, in which particular selves and their worlds, and hence society itself, are re-created and confirmed. The structural analogies between consulting an astrologer and listening to his words and going to a temple and having a religious ritual (*pūja*) performed are obvious enough. They become weak only with respect to the degree of comprehension achieved in the *pūja* as opposed to that achieved through consultation in the spoken word, as the former is likely to be in archaic Sanskrit. A close inspection of horoscope reading will reveal the nature of their significance as ideology; it will show how myths of the self and society are parallel to the structures of the ideology of *karma* and *dharma*.

Opposing the common assumption that astrology is merely an expression of archaic

- and degrading - superstition, my paper concludes that the Indian system of divinity, as a cultural system, is based on a particular cosmic vision and lends human experience value and meaning. Astrological practices cannot be differentiated from other social practices on the basis of their symbolic exchange or their rhetorical powers (Beinorius 2008). The specific nature of astrology lies in a particular cosmological perspective. All human life is lived symbolically and in conformity with various theories, mythologies and ideologies, so the ready availability of a symbolic statement about one's own life, containing both explicit and implicit structures that denote continuity with other areas of symbolic life such as religion, medicine, and human relationships, seems a credible and worthwhile exercise.

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