

A Concise History of Hindu Astrology and Indian Spirituality

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Abstract

Original Research Article

This essay refers to the concise history of Hindu astrology, highlighting its symbolism present in its spirituality which is transversal to all cultures. In a summarized way, it also mentions the foundations and main conceptions of Hindu astrology, namely Rasi, Nakshastra, Navagrahas, Bhava, Dashas.

Keywords: Hindu astrology, Indian spirituality, Hindu astrological symbolism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Indian culture, Hindu astrology is both a method of divination and also an integral part of their spirituality and cultural traditions (Dreyer, 1997). Hindu astrology is one of the Vedangas, complementary discipline of Vedas¹, whose purpose was to elaborate a calendar² for practicing the Hindu sacred rituals. The sage Maharshi Bhṛigu compiled the first Vedic astrological text named Bhṛigu Samhita (Catarino, 2018), one of the great seven sages who is considered the “Father of Hindu astrology”. Lagadha Muni compiled the Vedanga-Jyotish (1400 B.C.) which is considered as the emblematic text of Indian astronomy and astrology; its purpose was to build a calendar to mark Hindu rituals. The philosophical roots of Hindu astrology involve the concepts of karma and reincarnation (Dasgupta, 1997), and the Vedas defend that personal karma, and the successive lives, is described by the position of the planets and stars whose symbolism might be expressed through the Indian sacred art (Martins, 2021). The connection between Vedic astrology and Hinduism is mentioned in the Mahabharata – an epic that contains the Bhagavad-Gita³ – where the Brahmins sages dedicated themselves to the “science of Light” or Jyotish (Cole, 2006) through the interpretation of the “map of karma”. It allowed people to make conscious choices in order to minimize the effects of their destiny (Hathaway, 2012), as defended by psychologist Carl Jung, in his book *Psychology and Eastern Religion*⁴: “everything that we are not consciously in contact with, it appears to us as destiny”. The Vedas argue that the major purpose of life is to

develop man spiritually, throughout the various incarnations, as described by the Mimamsa school, one of the six *Darshanas* of Indian philosophies that follow the sacred books of Hinduism (Fernández, 2021).

- (1) Indian spirituality has its roots in the sacred books of Hinduism named by Vedas. These are constituted by 4 books, namely RigVeda or “Veda of the hymns”, the Sama-Veda or “Veda of ritual songs”, the Yajur-Veda or “sacrificial prohibition” and the Atharva-Veda with several “medical descriptions”. For a deeper study of this topic, please read Keith, Arthur (1998). *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Vol. I, II.
- (2) The Hindu calendar or Panchang is lunisolar with several types according to the region of India. In 1957, the Calendar Reform Commission established a standard lunisolar calendar, dividing it into 12 months according to the lunar cycle, with an adjustment of 1 month every 30 months. The Indian National Calendar marks the dates of festivals and rituals of Indian culture, such as, Kartika (October-November in the Gregorian calendar) where Diwali or Festival of Lights is celebrated. For a deeper study of this topic, please read Richmond, B. (1956). *Time Measurement and Calendar Construction*. Leiden: Brill Archive.
- (3) Vyassa, Krishna-Dwaip. (2007). *Bhagavad-Gita* (Org. por António Barahona). Lisboa: Assírio&Alvim.
- (4) Jung, Carl. (2009). *Psicologia e Religião Oriental*. Petrópolis, RJ: Editora Vozes.

2. METHODS

In this essay on a concise History of Hindu Astrology and Indian Spirituality, some articles and books were collected and analyzed that are available in libraries. Thus, 30 items were selected, based on its historical and spiritual relevance for this essay. This is to make them useful to the reader who wants to have just a global idea of this topic, without neglecting its scientific aspect.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 A concise history of Hindu astrology and Indian spirituality

In the early history of Hindu astrology, which includes the study of the Vedas (2500-500 A.C.) and Indian philosophies, we find in the RigVeda the names of the planets and the zodiac, while in the Atharvaveda the names of the constellations or nakshastras are mentioned (Pingree, 2019). Gargya was one of the emblematic names of this time, having presented the zodiacal divisions in an astrological chart. The Vedas argue that the essence of all manifestation is Brahman or Consciousness One, where each human being acts according to the consciousness of his soul, mind and body which will determine his destiny (Sutton, 1999).

In the history of Hindu astrology (500 B.C. to XI century), from antiquity to medieval times, we have to mention that during the spread of Buddhism, the study of Hindu astrology went into decline. It returned to assume a relevant role around 100 B.C., in the city of Ujjain, where Western and Eastern cultural perspectives of astrology share their knowledge (Gopalan, 2015). For example, the astrological Tetrabiblos by the Greek Ptolomeu, contained mundane astrology (agricultural calendar, natural phenomena) and natal astrology (human being and the cosmos) while Hipparchus discovered the precession of the equinoxes, contributing to the concept individual horoscope that was introduced to India around 100 B.C. and 200 A.C. Yavanacharya ("Ionian Teacher") or Pythagoras who also studied astronomy and astrology with the Indian sages wrote the works named Vrihayavan Jatak and Laghu Yavan Jatak, while Valmiki, author of Ramayana, was an astrologer that explained in detail the movements of the planets. In the 1st century, the book Yavanajataka was translated from Greek into Sanskrit (Campion, 2012). In the Classic Age, it is worth mentioning Varahamihira, also called Varaha or Mihir. He was an Indian philosopher mathematician, astronomer and astrologer who summarized all the astronomical and astrological knowledge of his time, through a set of works called Pancha-Siddhantika ("Five Treatises") including the Daivajna-Vallabha, Brihat Samhita and Brihat Jataka. The latter describe planets, lunar nodes, zodiacal signs and houses (Vaharamihira, 1985).

He also built the Meru Stambh, known nowadays as Qutub Minar, an astronomical observation center. Another name is Aryabhata, who was an Indian mathematician-astronomer. He wrote Surya Siddhanta which is an Indian astronomical textbook that describes rules for calculating the motion of the planets and the moon in relation to the constellations. It influenced the Hindu luni-solar calendar designated by Siddhantic calendar (Jha, 1988). The Brihat Parashara Hora Shastra or "The Great Book on Horoscopy by Parashara" is also relevant in Hindu astrology because it is the foundational work of Vedic astrology on the Hour of an event. Another emblematic work on Vedic astrology is Kalyan Varma by Saravali (Pingree, 2019).

In the history of Hindu astrology, during the Arab invasions (X to XV centuries), we have to highlight the work of Al Baruni, an Arab scholar. He had some skills in Sanskrit which allowed him to translate the Brahma-Gupta into Arabic, with the name of Indica. This contributed to Hindu astrology which became known in Europe, namely Germany. During Islamic rule, the Hejira calendar which was entirely lunar was used, although some Indian astrologers maintained the Siddhantic calendar. This led to the celebration of Hindu religious festivals on different days, according to the calendar chosen on a given place of India (Chakravarty, 1975).

During the European rule (XVII to XX century), namely through British colonization, The Christian Gregorian calendar replaced the Muslim calendar. After India's Independence, the Calendar Reform Committee was appointed to verify the most appropriate calendar for uniformity across India. It was decided that the city of Ujjain should provide the central time zone from which the ephemeris was designated in the same way as the Greenwich, in England. This procedure had an effect on the way calculations are performed in Hindu astrology (Industrial Research, 1955). In the history of contemporary India, Alan Leo, who studied Hindu astrology in India tried to incorporate some conceptions of it in the western astrological model, such as decanate (Leo, 2000).

In Eastern culture, one of the most iconic images of Hindu astrology⁵ and Indian spirituality is that represented in Indian sacred art (Nath, 1956). Here, a man is shown holding in one hand a pot containing the néctar of immortality (identical to that of Sri Dhanwantari, god of Ayurveda), symbolizing the relief of the suffering of others, with a Japa Mala and the Holy Book of Vedas in his other hand. This shows that Hindu astrology simultaneously involves a spiritual theory and practice (Frawley, 2000).

(5) Sivapriyananda, S. (1990). *Astrology an Religion in Indian Art*. New Delhi, ND: Abhinav Publications. Figure 63, page 117, with the description "Kumbha

(Aquarius), horoscope painting, Rajasthan, 19century A.D.”

It should be noted that the main festival of Hinduism is the Kumbh Mela (from sanskrit, khumb-pot e mela-festival). It takes place in rotation in 4 cities, respectively Prayagraj, Ujjain, Nashik, Haridwar, every 12 years. It is done in the place where the sacred rivers Ganges, Yamuna, Saraswati are found, allowing the pilgrim to purify himself, read the sacred texts and pray to God. This festival is based on a legend, in which good and evil had dispute over the pot containing the nectar of immortality, called “Amrit” (Sivapriyananda, 1990).

For its part, Kumbha also refers to the symbolism of the sign of Aquarius, whose spirituality cuts across Eastern and Western cultures, namely from the Bible^{6,7}: “*Jesus sent Peter and John saying: «Go and prepare Easter for us.» They ask to Him: «Where do You want us to prepare it?» He said to them: «Behold, as you enter the city, a man carry a cruse of water will meet you. Follow him into the house he enters and you will say to the owner of the house: The master says to you: “Where is the room where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples? He will show you a large and furnished room upstairs. Prepare it there».* They left and found everything just as He has told them, and prepared the Passover.”

3.2 A concise description of some Hindu astrological symbolism

The foundations and main conceptions of Hindu astrology, namely Rasi, Nakshastra, Navagrahas, Bhava, Dashes are also described in a succinct way in this essay (Bhardwaj, 2021). Thus, the Nirayana (sidereal zodiac) is an imaginary belt of 360 degrees, which is divided into twelve equal parts of 30 degrees named as sign or *Rasi*. The twelve signs or Rasas are Mesha (from 14th April to 13th May), Vrishaba (from 14th May to 13 June), Mithuna (from 14th June to 14 July), Kataka (from 15th July to 15th August), Simba (from 16th August to 15th September), Kanya (from 16th September to 15th October), Thula (from 16th October to 14th November), Vrischika (from 15th November to 14th December), Dhanus (from 15th December to 14th January), Makara (from 15th January to 12 February), Kumbha (from 13th February to 12th March), Meena (from 13th March to 13 April) (Kannan, 1981).

(6) The Hindu calendar celebrates the Holi or Colour Festival during the full moon of Phalguna, corresponding to February-March of the Gregorian Calendar when Christian Lent and Easter occur; The Hindu procession of Ganesh Chaturthi is also celebrated on the 4th day of Bhadrapada, corresponding to August-September of the Gregorian calendar when Christian procession of the Assumption of the Immaculate takes place.

(7) Costa, Fr A. (1981). *Bíblia Sagrada*. Lisboa: Difusora Bíblica. Mt 26, 17-19; Mc 14, 12-16.

For its part, Western astrology is called tropical because it is based on the signs (a mathematical construction that looks like the calendar), while Hindu astrology is called sidereal because it is based on the constellations, consisting of 27 sectors along the ecliptic called Nakshastra. Their names are related to a star or group of stars, namely, Ashvini, Bharani, Kritika (Pleiades), Rohini (Aldebaran), Mrigashirsha, Ardra (Betelgeuse), Punarvasu (Castor and Pollux), Pushya, Aslesha, Magha (Regulus), Purva Phalguni, Uttara Phalguni (Denebola), Hasta, Chitra (Spica), Svati (Arcturus), Vishakha, Anuradha, Jyeshtha, Mula, Purva Ashadha, Uttara Ashadha, Shrivana, Dhanishta, Satabhishak (Sadachbia), Purva Bhadrapada, Uttara Bhadrapada, Revati According to Vedas the starting point for the nakshastras is Kritika (Pleiades) (Burgess, 1866).

Hindu astrology considers nine planets or Navagrahas that are called Surya (Sun), Chandra (Moon), Budha (Mercury), Shukra (Venus), Mangala (Mars), Guru (Jupiter), Shani (Saturn), Rahu (North node of the Moon) and Ketu (South node of the Moon) (Raman, 2015). Another important element of Hindu astrology is the zodiacal house or Bhava that represents twelve different areas of one’s life, namely, First House (body, general appearance), Second House (wealth, values), Third House (brothers, short travels and basic education), Fourth House (mother and house, latter part of one’s life), Fifth House (children, creativity), Sixth House (work, service), Seventh House (marriage partner, business partnership), Eighth House (one’s sexuality, death), Ninth House (foreign travel, higher education), Tenth House (father and career, own status), Eleventh House (friendships, groups’ participation), Twelfth House (restrictions and limitations, praying) (Sheth, 2021).

The forecasting tool is also an important facet of the Hindu astrology and it uses the Dasha (period) of each of the nine planets to determine in a certain moment a specific effect in one’s life (Sharma, 1973). There are several types of Dasha systems, but only two of them are used and designated by Vimshottari and Ashtottari. The duration of Dasha of each planet is 6 years for Surya; Chandra, 10 years; Budha, 17 years; Shukra, 20 years; Mangala, 7 years; Guru, 16 years; Shani, 19 years; Rahu, 18 years; Ketu, 7 years (Inglish, 1973).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Indian spirituality is transversal to all of its culture, namely in Indian philosophies, Indian traditional medicine (Ayurveda), Indian sacred art, among others (Tripathi, 2008). Thus, this essay has sought to describe succinctly the relationship of Hindu

between Hindu astrology and Indian spirituality as inherent to its tradition (Stone, 1981). The practice of Hindu astrology is much more than the application of a set of techniques that allow you to make predictions and give advice to people. This spiritual art emphasizes the need of harmonious human behaviour expressed by the philosophical concepts of karma and dharma, without which astrology is simply a rational exercise similar to that practiced by other exact sciences (Dreyer, 1990).

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