

ASTROLOGY

Prof Devinder Singh Chahal, PhD
 Institute for Understanding Sikhism
 4418 Martin-Plouffe, Laval, Quebec, Canada H7W 5L9

There is no doubt about the popularity of astrology all over the world. It is estimated that more than half the population either believes in it or interested enough to consult astrologers and read predictions published in the media. Since the beginning of 20th century there is a marked resurgence of interest in astrology in America and the number of practicing astrologers could match that of psychiatrists.

The number of people consulting astrologers is increasing at very high rate throughout the world. This practice has become more prominent than before among the Canadians of Indian origin, especially the Sikhs. Almost all the ethnic TV programs are broadcasting horoscopes and special sessions for future predictions regularly. Some of the astrologers are so busy that they shuttle between Toronto and Vancouver very often to satisfy their clients. It has been noticed that some parents in India consult the astrologers to find out the best time and day when the planets will be in most favorable positions for a successful future of the unborn child. Then doctor is requested to force the birth at that particular time.

It is strange that recently the University Grant Commission (UGC) has issued a directive to a number of universities at the behest of the Union Ministry for the Development of Human Resources, to introduce Vedic Astrology as a science subject. It has expectedly generated a lot of heat.

Protagonists of Astrology

Navile [4] says that in India, the Vedic period witnessed remarkable flowering of astrology. There is vast amount of Sanskrit literature on the subject explaining the complex system and techniques evolved over the centuries by the learned sages and philosophers. Astrology has always been recognized and respected as a noble profession. Hindu astrologers were consulted by the Mogul emperors and later by the British rulers. Through astrology, people explored the prospects of their health, wealth and happiness. Every venture, activity and even a journey were undertaken on the advice of astrologers who pronounced the auspiciousness of the day and time. No wonder, astrology was raised to the status of a science in India.

He supports astrology as science with following examples:

1. As the story goes, the renowned Nobel Laureate Sir CV Raman was once performing religious rituals with offerings of food to his ancestors at Gaya. Someone said to him, “*Sir, you are such a great scientist but how can you believe that this food would reach your ancestors*”. Sir Raman smiled and replied, “*I cannot prove that this will not reach them*”.
2. He quotes a fascinating account by James Forbes in his famous work ‘Oriental Memoirs’ (1813) about some startling predictions by a well-known Brahmin astrologer of Bombay, which came true. One relates to the appointment of Mr Hodges as Governor of Bombay in 1767, which was prophesied by the astrologer many years before when he was a young official of the East India Company. The narrative makes a very interesting reading. In 1766, orders were issued appointing his junior Mr Spencer as Governor to succeed the current incumbent Mr Crommelin. Hodges lodged a strong protest complaining of injustice in the court of company directors whereupon he was suspended from service by the Governor and Council of Bombay and the matter reported to London. When Hodges informed the Brahmin astrologer about this, the latter stuck to his prediction and assured him that Spencer would never succeed. Anyhow, Hodges began preparing for his return voyage to England. Surprisingly, just on the eve of his departure, a letter was received from London canceling Spencer’s appointment in the light of some serious charges against him while he was posted in Bengal and at the same time appointing Hodges as Governor as reward for his long admirable service record. Thereafter, Hodges developed such a deep faith and respect for his astrologer that throughout his career, he undertook no important step without consulting him.
3. He refers another case of a young English lady in Bombay who was on her way to join her husband at Surat. On the eve of her departure, the same Brahmin astrologer happened to visit her host family in Bombay. The host jokingly asked him to tell

the destiny of the young lady. To the surprise of everybody, the Brahmin gave her a penetrating and compassionate look and said in the native language understood by the host that “her cup of felicity is full — and a bitter poison awaits her for, which she must prepare”. How prophetic were his words since on her arrival in Surat, she found her husband critically ill and he expired in her arms.

4. He emphasized that predictions by astrologers have indeed come true on many occasions. Almost every Hindu, irrespective of his belief in astrology gets the new born child’s horoscope drawn. Those with absolute faith would even approach the astrologer to determine the influence of the child’s planetary combination on the well-being and prosperity of the near and dear ones. The horoscope serves as a reference document to determine the auspicious timing for functions, new ventures and pursuits in life in order to ensure success. In matrimonial alliances, the astrologers are usually asked to examine the horoscopes of the prospective groom and bride in order to establish their compatibility.

(Note: In the above examples # 2 & 3 he did not mention the name of the Brahman.)

Antagonists to Astrology

Dawan [3] says that our profound reverence for the Vedas notwithstanding, the UGC move does appear to be an inadvertent attempt to throw the nation back to dark periods of medievalism, superstition and obscurantism. It also means the negation of the spirit of rationalism, logic, scientific exploration and analysis. That this should happen when brilliant scientists everywhere, including a galaxy of Indians, are taking us farther and farther along the path of satellites, super computers, robots, information technology, genetics and biotechnology is all the more lamentable.

How come that Vedic Astrology is to be treated as a science subject? Science represents systematized knowledge and strives to explore the truth through rational enquiry, analytical/investigation, and rigorous laboratory tests and experiments. Can we claim the same for palmistry, numerology or any other branch of Vedic Astrology?

The laws and principles enunciated by science have universal validity and unfailing accuracy. But what about the reliability of predictions made by astrologers? Muni Vashisht, undoubtedly among our most highly revered, learned and spacious sages, must have made the best possible astrological studies and calculations before deciding upon most auspicious moment for Lord Rama’s coronation. But instead of coronation, there

followed the exile for 14 long years. The royal family of Nepal is known to have placed absolute faith in their astrologers, who obviously failed to foretell the most gruesome massacre in their land-locked kingdom.

Dhawan further draws our attention to recent happenings. Had there been cent percent accuracy and reliability in astrology, the world would have been far happier. If only an astrologer could forewarn us regarding the Gujarat earthquake, or hurricanes, tornadoes, flash floods, air disasters, train mishaps or road accidents! But, alas, no astrologer would tell us in advance about a murder, an abduction, a robbery, a violent strife, a Malta tragedy, a plane hijack to Kandahar, and so on.

He says that if astrologers cannot predict and help avert such catastrophes, what good can they render to society? If everything is to happen as ordained by God and as predetermined according to our fate, where is the role of astrology? Is it not better that our time and energy be devoted to those pursuits which may hopefully bring a better tomorrow for our brethren and ourselves?

Dhawan strongly approves that a scientist who makes a better train, a genetist who helps evolve better vegetables and cereals, a researcher who opens up a new vista in an endeavor to conquer cancer or AIDS, a psychiatrist who enables us to get rid of some of our tensions and inner conflicts, an economist who shows a better path to development, an architect who builds reasonably good and cheap houses for the houseless, an engineer whose work gives us better telecom and Internet services, a man of letters whose creativity produces things of beauty giving joy for ever, are evidently greater benefactors of mankind than the whole lot of astrologers. **A doctor who insists on matching the DNA and other vital things in the would-be bride and groom is their greater well-wisher than the astrologer insistent upon matching their horoscopes or astrological charts.**

If astrology still claims to study the impact of planets and stars upon our lives, what about those stars and galaxies which are still to be discovered? How will they change the course of our lives?

Finally, Dhawan recommends that our universities, already constrained for funds, will be better advised to leave astrology - Vedic or non-Vedic - alone, and dedicated themselves to those pursuits which will make us better and happier human beings on this planet.

Astrology and Nanakian Philosophy [2]

It was reported earlier in this Journal [2] that Guru Nanak raised his voice against astrology during the 15th century has been recorded in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) [1]. It is a pity that in spite of the fact that Guru Nanak made the people aware of the futility of the astrology since the 15th century, people, especially the Sikhs, still are after the astrology because of the fact that ancient philosophy, mythology, and miraculous stories are permanently imprinted in their minds and they (even including some scientists) lack scientific temper. It is unfortunate that many Sikh families strongly believe in horoscopes and consult astrologer for all their business and family affairs regularly. Let us pay a little attention to Nanakian Philosophy what it has to say and then compare it with the views of science.

AWt sqI nWkU pkVih sWdyiqin I A]
mgr pWkYkCun sWYehjupdm AI A] 2]

AGGS, M 1, P 662 [1].

"One holds the nose with his two fingers and thumb and claims to see three worlds. But it is very astonishing that he does not know what is behind his back."

gix gix j qkukWfI kInI] PV'sxwV'qqun cInI]
sBSI aWbir gr sdbublcirU]
hr kQnI bdaun sgl I Cwru]2]

AGGS, M 1, P 904.

"Astrologer counts and recounts and prepare the horoscope. Then he reads it to his clients. But he does not recognize the reality. The highest of all is the philosophy of the Guru. All others deliberations are ashes (means nothing)."

mn kI pqt vWcxI sKI hI'sKusihU]
sobhmXU BI W AWKI A V ij bWYbhm bCwru]

AGGS, M 3, P 1092.

"(Instead of reading the horoscopes of others) read the horoscope of your mind to find the highest joy of the joys. The one, who understand the Divine thought (philosophy), is called the noble Brahman."

Science

There is also no scientific proof that positions of planets have any effect on the future of human beings. Nevertheless, the stars of most of the astrologers are in very good positions as they are minting lots of money by deceiving the innocent Sikhs and others. Dr Joe Schwarcz, Professor of Chemistry [5] recently reported that it is so because by and large many people are not well versed in scientific principles or critical thinking.

His observations on astrology reported in his article, *"Sense and Nonsense"* are reproduced here for information of those who are trapped into the fallacy of astrology [5]:

"Astrology has been practiced since the time of the ancient Egyptians. This, however, does not make it valid. Is there any reason to believe that astrology works? Any physics student can calculate that the gravitational effect of the heavenly bodies on human bodies is insignificant. In fact, as far as a baby is concerned, the gravitational effect of the obstetrician at the moment of birth is far greater than the effect of the stars. Is our destiny then shaped by the body weight of the doctor who brings us into the world?"

There is, however, no need to use physics to refute astrology. Its validity can be readily tested. Just ask a number of people to write autobiographical sketches. Give these to astrologers together with the birth dates of the subjects. Ask the astrologers to match the character sketches with the birth dates. They can't. It is also interesting to note that when birth dates of scientists or politicians or actors or psychics are compiled, they are remarkably random. Shouldn't unemotional, skeptical, profit-oriented scientists have different birth signs than sensitive, altruistic, generous psychics? But I guess I'm being too cynical. It must be because I'm a Leo and everyone knows that Leos are much too sensible to believe in such nonsense."

Although astrology may be more than 3000 years old, nevertheless, according to *Gurbani* and science there is no effect of the position of the planets, moon, and sun either at the time of birth or at any time of life on any person's future. It is a sheer folly to depend on astrology for any purpose of life.

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5. Schwarcz, Joe. 1998. *Sense and Nonsense*. The Gazette, Montreal, Sunday, October 25, 1998, page C4.