

INTRODUCTION

I.1 ANCIENT TECHNOLOGIES

The gods of the Sun¹ and Moon² are often portrayed in attendance to The Medicine Buddha.³ Worship within the temple of the Medicine Buddha is said to be good for study of medicine and health. Shingon Mikkyō considers the Medicine Buddha to be secretive and hidden (mystical). He illuminates (like the Sun and Moon) only those that are worthy – yet his hand is outstretched showing he grants boons. Atharva Veda describes the removal of sickness via the use of this deity's mantra and a certain black wood.

The Gods of Shingon Mikkyō by Sato Tamotsu

Although a number of 'occult' sciences remain intact into the 21st century, many have been lost or driven into semi-obscurity. Much of what is today called pseudo-science or ancient superstition had in the past important practical application. These ancient technologies were often melting pots of observable phenomena and ritual that when combined could be used to coerce Providence or the Fates to manifest a favourable outcome.

In the past there were quite literally necromancers, rain-makers, oracles, magicians and geomancers. Those skilled in these arts were consulted in all manner of undertakings, such as healthcare, childbirth, attainment of wealth, victory in war, love and longevity; and – most importantly – foreknowledge of events. In a world of uncertainty, the honouring and propitiation of nature and its emissaries (such as planets) were believed to answer the querent – if one was skilled enough to interpret their answers.

To the western mindset a term such as 'ancient technology' appears a little paradoxical, as it is mostly assumed that the ancients lived in a kind of ignorant bliss, only improving their situation with the advent of modern industrialised society. This myth is quickly dispelled by spending an afternoon roaming the galleries of any major museum and studying its exhibits. Closer analysis of cultural antiquity quickly reveals how little daily existence has really changed. Technologies employed in former

eras were (in some ways) just as ingenious as those of our current time. Although deprived of iPhones, combustion engines and atom bombs,⁴ the ancients were able to combine surprising levels of sophistication, functionality and exquisite artistry⁵ – all of this from the most basic and most abundant of materials.

Knowledge is quite literally power, so technologies were at times held in check through the initiation⁶ process – knowledge transferable only through the master/disciple relationship. Such practices often included detailed instruction in the art of astronomy, martial arts, medicine, surgery, metallurgy, chemistry, geomancy and more. Astrology was one such important technology, eventually fused with alchemy, herbalism and geomancy – its remit touching every part of human existence.

1.2 ASTR-ODOLOGY

Some of mankind's earliest religious works pay tribute to the stars, the Sun and the Moon. Astr-ology⁷ (in one form or another) is to be found in all ancient cultures. From occident⁸ to orient, the worship of planetary gods often presided over a nation's prosperity and fertility.

Today many of the world's 'developed' countries rest in a state of indifference toward astrology and, just to add complexity to an already elusive subject, the east–west interpretations of this subject diverged some 1500 years ago,⁹ having gone their separate ways over the course of time.

Though essentially rooted in the same star-pool, alternative astrological schools (such as Greek, Roman, Persian and later Arabic¹⁰) imprinted their own interpretations upon the constellations and planets, eventually culminating in what today could be called Western Astrology. This specialisation of astrology was largely precipitated by different cultural beliefs – however, dislocation of the western zodiac was caused by a phenomenon known as precession, a technical term used to describe the Sun's apparent backward movement through the signs of the zodiac. Observable only over long periods, precession was perhaps understood by Indian astronomers (by inference) but is more broadly accepted as an earlier Greek discovery.¹¹

Meticulous cataloguing of the Sun's position along the ecliptic revealed it to be in a state of slow precession, shifting its stellar background at a rate of approximately 50 arc seconds yearly. Over a period of some 2160 years¹² this creeping motion traverses a full zodiacal sign (30°). Over the course of 25,920 years the Sun completes an entire lap of the zodiac. Any use of compensatory calculations allowing for this solar motion is said to favour a sidereal zodiac, that is to say, it is based upon the fixity of stars,

preserving a secure reference point from which to commence the zodiac. Conversely, calculation based on the Sun's current position (at the spring equinox), marking the zodiac's starting point, is said to favour a tropical zodiac, or – to put it another way – an astrology that is eternally tied to Earthly seasons.¹³

In light of the powerful and unique symbology associated with each of the twelve constellations (within which reside the zodiacal signs), it seems unlikely that a transitory zero degree would endure as a popular means of astrological calculation. This in effect leads to the displacement of one sign every 2160 years, eventually usurping all signs during one full precessionary cycle, also termed 'A Great Year'. During this great year the Sun is effectively framed against *every* constellation and at every point is held to represent 0° Aries. Any system of astrological measurement that adheres to this methodology is based upon a tropical zodiac that gives precedence to the declination of the Sun – a kind of 'Solar-ology', if you will.

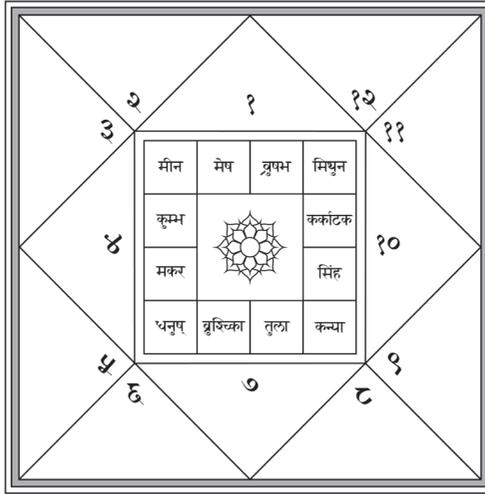
In our current century, discontinuity of sign and constellation is not so great, but for future generations the gap will inexorably widen. Tropical astrology has long acknowledged this fact, working now with an abstract zodiac that moves independently of the stars. It should also be noted here that, in its favour, the tropical model does provide a commonly agreed exactness of tropical degree as well as dispensing with the need to recalculate any accrued degrees of precession, which as we will see in Part I is far from being agreed upon.

In contrast to a tropical model, Jyotish is a sidereal astrology that aligns itself to the actual stars and therefore requires constant adjustment to counter the slow march of precession. *Ayanāṁśa*¹⁴ (the name given to its corrective value) may be applied to any tropical computation to rectify the stellar background to reflect its true state, for any time or date in question.

Astrology is a highly resilient and adaptive system (whichever variation one finds most favourable), managing to stay current to the needs of successive generations. Experimentation of techniques, particularly by those who favour the tropical model, has seen a strong infusion of Jyotish in the last decade. This in part has come from numerous written works on Jyotish by accomplished western astrologers, or those who have sought to enrich their predictive skills by integrating Jyotish.

Typically, many new Vedic recruits are drawn to the use of its lunar Nakshatras (see Chapter 26). Although there are rich lunar interpretations in oriental astrology,¹⁵ these are also to be found in the western tradition – although an intimate knowledge of their use and indications has withered over the centuries.¹⁶

I.3 JYOTISH



Jyotish might be translated as ‘science of starlight’ (or ‘knowledge of starlight’). India’s traditional astrology is but one of a number of profound Vedic sciences attempting to deal with the true nature of existence. There are references to various types of celestial phenomena, including planets and stars within the pages of the *Vedas*¹⁷ (India’s oldest writings). Whilst some of these texts detail astute astronomical observations, others delve deeply into the very fabric of the universe, often through the medium of astrology. Vedic texts make little distinction between astrology and astronomy, seeing each as an integral part of the whole. By providing a means to divine future events, honour the gods or confer appropriate times to perform sacrificial offerings, *Jyotish* often incurs the epithet ‘the eyes of the *Vedas*’; that is, a means by which we are able to see and comprehend what the *Vedas* attempt to reveal.

Any would-be student hungry for Vedic knowledge is first confronted by a study of its various limbs, known as *Shadaṅgas*. These six limbs are likened to parts of a living organism called *Vedapuruṣa*, each indispensable for the maintenance of the whole and each intimately connected. These are delineated as: eyes (*Jyotish*/vision), nose (*Shiksha*/phonetics), mouth (*Vyakarana*/word), ears (*Nirukta*/sound), hands (*Kalpa*/tactile) and feet (*Chhanda*/movement), all being essential components for any deeper understanding of its pansophy.

Like many aspects of Vedic wisdom, each part can be subjected to a series of subdivisions to further attenuate its focus. In the case of *Jyotish* it too is subjected to a series of subdivisions,¹⁸ described below.

Gola (observational astronomy)

A detailed study of spherical geometry, planets, stars, zodiacal signs and ecliptic. Gola¹⁹ primarily concerns itself with the accurate measurement and cataloguing of astronomical bodies with reference to the ecliptic and equatorial plane. It also concerns itself with retrograde planets, eclipse prediction and lunar nodes, planetary motion, comets, asteroids, sunspots and the variation of stellar luminosity. It also concerns itself with the construction of such devices that aid in the pursuit of these observations.

Gaṇita (calculation)

A subdivision of Gola forming the bedrock of calculation techniques contained in various Siddhāntic material. Gaṇita is expressed through advanced mathematical formulae enabling an accurate prediction of celestial motion including: solar ingress of signs, rising and setting solar timetables, solstices, equinoxes, eclipses, calculation of ephemerides and calendars (both solar and lunar) and the positions of planets for the casting of horoscopes (Jataka).

Jataka/Horā (natal astrology)

Calculation of a horoscope using the person's birth time and location. Jataka represents what most would recognise as astrology, that is, analysis of the heavens tied to one's birth data. Jataka predicts probable life-events, relative to planetary placements, subdivisional charts (Vargas) or dasha periods (timing), and so on. Jataka is also an assessment of inherent, acquired or collective karma and the remedial techniques thereof, best suited to alleviate an individual's suffering.

Prasna (questioning)

Also known as *horary astrology*, deals specifically with asking questions. *Prasna* means 'questioning'. Prasna charts are usually erected at their moment of occurrence, or the time of the question is duly noted and consulted thereafter. The information contained in this snapshot of the heavens is then deciphered to answer the querent. Some astrologers may employ prasna charts if the birth data submitted is in question or the birth horoscope seems overly confusing or contradictory.

Mhurta (timing of events)

Also known as *electional astrology*, *Mhurta* means ‘moment’.²⁰ This popular branch of Jyotish may be used to elect all manner of daily and yearly religious and social undertakings – from the laying of a foundation stone to a marriage. *Mhurta* is popular with some Āyurvedic pharmacies, both for the manufacturing and prescribing of medicines (*Mhurta* helping attune a remedy to specific ailment). *Mhurta* also helps elect an auspicious moment to attract the attention of a specific deity when hoping for a particular outcome.

Nimitta (omenology)

Perhaps one of the most interesting yet least accessible levels²¹ of Jyotish. It interprets portents on a minute-to-minute basis. A number of classic astrological works recount favourable or unfavourable omens delivered by such diverse messengers as flocking birds, baying hounds, wandering camels, ravens and the cries of a peacock. Omens were also forecast by the hue or obscuration of the luminaries (Sun and Moon). Other celestial events included lightning, meteors, eclipses and sunspots.

Jyotish refers to the planets²² as *grahas*, a word meaning to ‘grasp’ or ‘seize’. To the ancients these nine celestial wanderers were considered primary dispensers of Earthly karma.²³ Individually these were: Sun (Sūrya), Moon (Chandra), Mercury (Budha), Venus (Shukra), Mars (Kuja), Jupiter (Brihaspati) and Saturn (Shani). In addition to the seven visible planets, two non-luminous planets were also considered, Rāhu and Ketu, referring to the north and south nodes of the Moon (see Chapter 24).

The Earth (and ultimately mankind) was perceived as occupying the epicentre of creation, with the stars, Moon and other planets revolving about us in their sequential distances. From closest to furthest these were Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and finally the Nakshatras (stars). The spherical mass of the Earth was buoyed up on *Earthly air* known as *Bhūvāyu*, suspended like a ball of iron between magnets while the planets were fastened about the pole star and driven eastwards on the *pravaha wind*.

This charting of the planets against their starry backdrop set the scene for great cosmic theatre, whose observation and decipherment proved an important tool with which to unlock the mysteries of the universe as well as gaining insights into an individual’s destiny. Through the medium of astrology it became possible to discern dosha (physical constitution), caste (social status), longevity, career, wealth and most importantly life purpose, known as *dharma*. India’s Rishis, or enlightened ones, were able to interpret

the movements of the planets and stars into an art form, which might then be applied to all aspects of human existence.

Much like its sister sciences (Āyurveda, Yoga or Vāstu), Jyotish is a resplendent archive of carefully catalogued information, infused with elaborate ritual, mathematics and eloquent language. Any or all attempts to absorb the entirety of this astrological system might stretch into multiple lifetimes. As one convert from Western Astrology once jokingly put it to me, ‘You might comfortably squeeze the entirety of Western Astrology into a match box and set it afloat upon the ocean of Vedic Astrology.’ The book you now hold in your hands contents itself with being a primer that seeks only to introduce and popularise India’s premier science.

One of the best ways to study Jyotish is to become intimate with the planets, to understand their personalities, life-lessons and personal histories/planetary ages.²⁴ Learning their stories allows each of them to converse with you. Once embraced, the planets take on a life of their own, no longer just glyphs inscribed within a geometric framework (the horoscope). Their positioning (for better or worse) and interactions start to offer up a wealth of information.

I.4 OVERVIEW

There remain innumerable ways to disseminate astrological knowledge, every teacher having their own methodology or expertise. One of my early tutors, also one with a strong mathematical inclination, used a simple counting strategy that ran roughly along the lines of:

1. individual planets
2. polarities, masculine/feminine, benefic/malefic, etc.
3. modes of sign expression, movable, fixed or dual
4. primary elements in astrology, Air, Fire, Water and Earth

and so on.

This book uses a similar tiered system, slowly building upon the information given in each section.

In Part I we ‘set up shop’ and consider some important prerequisites, one of which is the commencement of the zodiac (a controversial topic in itself but a highly important consideration). Here we take a closer look at the corrective calculation known as Ayanāṃśa. From here I introduce each of the planets through a series of planetary portraits, casting each as

players in a grand celestial court and wherever possible trying to integrate the bedrock of this science, its rich and diverse mythologies.

Part II introduces the zodiac and the symbolism of the twelve signs, known as *Rashi*. We also consider the construction of horoscopes, some of the most popular designs, their application and strengths. Part II also looks at domification (or astrological houses) and the most popular method of dividing their space. This section also includes a study of significations (called *Kāraḱas*) for the twelve houses, as well as their combinations. This Part also dwells on the retrograde motion of planets, as well as the effects of solar combustion and planetary war.

Part III introduces medical astrology and its interaction with *Āyurveda*, India's 'complete' and indigenous medical system. Here connections between planet and constitution (known as *dosha*) are explored along with character portraits of *tridosha* (*Vāta*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*), better known as the guardians of health. This Part also examines the science of taste and the impact of strengthened or weakened planets, their effects on metabolism and tissues, and so on. It also includes the use of divisional charts (called *Vargas*), planetary periods known as *dashas* and, finally, *Dr̥ṣṭi* (planetary aspects), the line of sight between the planets.

Part IV deals almost exclusively to the Moon and its lunar mansions (known as *Nakshatras*). Jyotish considers Moon a 'special planet' and, as our nearest and dearest celestial companion, this entire section is given over to its motion, occultation, eclipsing lunar nodes and daily sojourn in the embraces of its 27 lunar brides.

Part V is dedicated to the propitiation of planets and remedial measures. Known as *Upayes*, we consider the use of yantra, gemstones, *rudrākṣa* beads, ceremonial offerings (*pooja*) and fire rituals, known as *ahuti*. We also explore *Bali/Shanti Karma*, elaborate planetary ceremonies performed in *Śrī Laṅkā* that aim to deflect the negative emissions of planets known as *graha-apala*.

There is no right or wrong way to learn Jyotish, there is only learning. With practice, experimentation and a little determination, Jyotish will start to reveal itself to you – becoming a kind of second nature. Any investment made in its deeper symbology will always reward. Its initial complexities, however daunting, *will* (over time) coalesce and harmonise, facilitating an open dialogue with the planets.

We begin therefore with a story – set in an age of seers, whose talents in the divination arts were unparalleled and unquestioned.