

# Astrology and the vedic tradition

By Gauranga Das Although there is much difference of opinions regarding the origins of Vedic civilization amongst the scientist, we could conclude that according to the tradition Vedic culture is the culture based on the Vedas, the ancient Sanskrit writings. Foremost of all this literature are the four Vedas, viz. Rig, Saama, Yajur and Atharva Veda. Tradition also holds that the Brahmanas, the Vedic priests who were responsible for the proper performance of the yajnas, the religious rituals prescribed by the Vedas, had to learn certain auxiliary sciences facilitating their duty. These were the six Vedanga, or limbs of the Veda, which include Siksha, Kalpa, Nirukta, Vyakarana, Chhanda and finally Jyotisha.

## Branches of Jyotisha

In his great work Maharishi Parasara explains that there are three divisions (skandhas) to the holy science of Jyotisha. These are Hora, Ganita and Samhita. Hora (or Jataka, as named elsewhere) refers to interpreting the planetary positions at someone's birth in terms of his karma, or past activities. Ganita (or Siddhanta) refers to calculations of planetary positions and movement. This branch may be called astronomy and it has a basic role in determining the time units, favorable times for Vedic rituals and serves as a basic for erecting the Janma Kundali, or birth chart as well. And finally the third one is Samhita, which refers not only to celestial phenomena but to a wide range of other omens (lakshana or shakuna) for predicting the future events. Pandit Harihara in his Prashna Marga mentions six further subdivisions or angas to this great science. These are Jataka (predictive astrology), Gola (movements of the Earth), Nimitta (omens), Prashna (queries), Muhurtha (electional astrology) and Ganita (astronomical calculations). Still, on the whole we should consider Jyotisha as an intrinsic art of Vedic tradition and a complex science elaborated upon by the greatest Maharishis of Vedic time, like Parashara, Bhrigu, Jaimini, Garga, Vyaasa and others. All these sages had learned this science in the disciplic succession (sampradaya or guru-parampara) from their predecessors and taught it to their disciples. Maharishi Parasara says thus (BPHS translated by Pundit G.C.Sharma, vol. 1. pg. 4.): ". . . I shall relate to you the science of astrology as it was heard by me from Brahma. The teachings of this science of astrology are to be given only to the students who are good and peacefully disposed, who honour the perceptors and elders, who speak only truth and who are God-fearing. It is only in this way that good will follow. The teachings of this science, again, should not be given to an unwilling student, to an atheist or to a crafty person."

## The Qualifications of an Astrologer:

In the above quotation we have seen that this science should be received through the parampara or disciplic succession. So the first qualification of a Jyotishi is to become accepted as a disciple of a learned and pure brahmana, who have received this science in the disciplic succession and mastered it. The further qualifications are listed by Maharishi Parashara and other sages in their works as follows:

" O vipra! The shastra expounded by Lord Brahma for Mahatma Narada and he (Narada) with all humbleness narrated the same to Rishis Shaunaka etc. and I have unfolded the same Shastra as it is, before you. This knowledge should never be imparted to a person who is jealous, backbiter, dull, arrogant and unknown. This supreme and pious shastra amongst all Vedanga should be taught well to the humble, devoted, truthful, intelligent, submissive and known persons. (. . .) A person knowing the subject matter of Hora Shastra should be truthful and able to exercise control over his senses. The auspicious and inauspicious predictions of such a person will come true." (BPHS, vol. 2., pg. 794-795., transl. by G.C. Sharma)

Acharya Varaha Mihira amongst others lists the following qualifications for an astrologer:

"Now the following are the virtues of an astrologer: He must be clean, efficient, bold, eloquent, possessed of genius or ready wit, knower of the time and place, sincere, not timid in assemblies, not to be overpowered by his fellow students, expert, free from vices, well-versed in the art of performing rituals of both curative and preventive types, as well as in that of magic and bathing, engaged in the worship of Gods, observances of

austerities and fast, possessed of great power generated by the wonderful achievements of his scientific knowledge and capable of answering queries made by others and suggesting remedial measures for troubles other than the visitations of God." (Brihat Samhita, transl. M. Ramakrishna Bhat, vol.1, pg. 8.) And finally, Pandit Harihara also elaborates on this subject as follows: " The exalted and recondite science of astrology is to be studied only by Brahmins. A proper study of the subject leads one to the acquisition of wealth, merit, salvation, respect and fame. ( . . )That person, who has mastery of this science, who has a good knowledge of mathematics, who leads a religious life, who is truthful, who is free from conceit and who is well versed in the Vedas, mantras and tantras, he alone can be called a Daivajna or seer. All the predictions made by such a person will come true and will never be false. The learned support this statement. ( . . )He who has acquired a thorough knowledge of the different Horas, who is an adept in the five Siddhantas, who has inferential ability and who is initiated into a secret mantra by a perceptor, can alone know horoscopy" (Prashna Marga, transl. by B.V. Raman, Vol. 1, pg. 9-13.)

Here the Pundit points again to the basic qualification of a Jyotisha: - Accepting an authentic guru and receiving the guru- (or Siddha-) mantra from him. This proves that astrology is not a mundane science subject to enquiry and logic, but a transcendental science understood by the grace of the Guru. Seeing nowadays the state of Jyotish where it is, I aimed at pointing out the importance of this feature and the other qualifications that all aspiring Vedic astrologers should develop if they want to be faithful to the tradition and qualified to understand this great mastery of Jyotish. As Jyotish is a Vedic science, we should adopt the Vedic process of learning enunciated even by Lord Krishna Himself in the Bhagavad-Gita:

tad viddhi pranipaataena pariprashnena sevayaa upadekshyaanti te jnaanam jnaaniinas tattva-darshinah " Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth." (Bg.4.34. transl. by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada).