

## **Hindu Astrology**

Symbols are part of every culture and an essential part of astrology. Those who practice Hinduism believe that symbols reveal the relationship individuals have or should have with the universe. According to Hindu beliefs the “seers” [semi-Divine beings] created astrology, and believed that the purpose of astrological symbols was to understand everyone’s role in the cosmic order of things (Behari 21). They believed that symbols represented the various Divine beings and provided a way for the world to relate to one’s soul (Behari 21). Symbolism also allows for consistency among different time eras. A modern male on his way to becoming a renouncer will still learn the same concepts through symbols as a male in ancient times. As males and females advance to different stages in their own lives (sacred thread or a renouncer), symbols reveal more profound and significant meanings (Behari 22). Some symbols conceal their true meaning, and individuals can spend their entire life unveiling one meaning after another (Behari 23).

The cross, circle, and arrow are commonly used symbols (Behari 22). While they convey similar meanings, different cultures add their own values and beliefs to their representations. The Hindu cross symbolizes humanity. Its North, East, South, and West points represent birth, life, death, and immortality. The vertical line represents eternal matter and the male gender, Purusha, while the horizontal line represents one’s eternal spirit and the female gender, Prakriti (Behari 28). The horizontal line contains manifestation elements in a golden egg called Hiranyagarbha (Behari 28). Hiranyagarbha consist of the five sensory qualities know as Tanmantras, five sense organs known as Indriyas, five elements known as Bhutras, and three prime qualities known as Trigunas (Behari 28). All these aspects provide the potential to either

undergo *moksa* [self realization and liberation] or hide one's pure nature due to the illusion created by *maya* [ignorance] (Behari 28). The horizontal line represents an individual's destiny ready to be fulfilled. The vertical line on the cross represents positive potential and commitment to fulfill cosmic duties (Behari 28). To achieve cosmic goals, sacrifices must be made and discipline must be followed. Manifestations of the vertical line consist of the Absolute dividing itself into two, Mula Prakriti (matter), and Daivi Prakriti (spirit) (Behari 28). Both the positive potential and destiny of an individual can only be met once the vertical and horizontal elements of the cross have intersected. The cross is significant across Hindu society. Brahmatma, a chief of Hindu priests, wore a head dress with two keys arranged as a cross, indicating its religious and spiritual value (Behari 26). It has also been noted that the ancient temples of Ellora, Elephanta, Varanasi and Mathura in India are all cross-shaped (Behari 26). The circle is another symbol that the Hindus believe represents the cosmos. It stands for unity and harmonious movements (Behari 30). The circle is where the sexless become female or male, and parts become whole. In Hindu astrology the circle also stands for polarity, and is demonstrated in the God Siva. In some myths, Siva shares his body with the Goddess Shakti. Male and female divine beings represent the polarity of the circle – also known as Ardha Nariswara (Behari 31). Lastly, the arrow also has a cosmic meaning with regards to direction and movement. The arrow is dynamic and similar to nature, always moving and always changing. In the Upanisads, the arrow is meant to be shot in the direction of one's Atman [Divine Self] because reaching your Atman is the ultimate goal of Upanisadic life (Behari 34). The arrow represents the spiritual efforts and instrument in achieving liberation (Behari 34).

In the Hindu tradition, almost all symbols are representative of a god or goddess. Gods and goddesses can also be considered as symbols for the one supreme God Brahman (Gibson

28). The objects that the gods carry and the animals with which they associate, carry significant meanings as well. A symbol commonly linked with divine beings is the Swastika. This symbol means ‘well-being’, is supposed to bring good luck (Gibson 28). It is drawn on floors during festivals or ceremonies of importance. Its four arms stand for space, the four Vedas, the four stages of life, and time (Gibson 29). *Om* is another very important and significant symbol to Hindus, as it means “sound of creation” (Gibson 28). It is believed to be the first sound ever made, and the basis for which all other sounds are made. It is used in meditation and chants. The lotus flower represents purity, another central value of Hindus. The flower grows in mud, but flourishes into a beautiful pure blossom. Gods and goddesses are shown sitting or stand on this flower to display the idea that evil has no hold on them (Gibson 29). Ash represents an individual’s everlasting soul. The body deteriorates but one’s Atman is eternal. Lastly, water is seen as a source of purification and life. It is often sprinkled on the ground to eliminate evil (Gibson 31). These common symbols pertain to beliefs and traditions within the Hindu society. Specific rituals and ceremonies can sometimes be centered around these astrological symbols.

Astronomy plays a large part in Hindu astrology. In Hinduism, constellations and planets have religious significance, and exercise influence over mundane affairs. The belief is that all divine spirits move around the earth in the circular formation known as the zodiac (Charak 10). The zodiac serves as a border or boundary within which gods, goddesses, constellations and planets can move. There are 27 groups of stars in Vedic astrology known as the Naksatras which stand for “a means of worship” (Harness xv). The Naksatras are thought to be static divine beings that arc east to west on the zodiac. The moon is said to have divided the zodiac into these 27 Naksatras (Harness xiii). According to myth, the moon god Soma was given 27 wives by the god Prajapati (creator god) (Harness xxiv). Each wife is tied to Soma, and this symbolizes the

connection that the moon has with each mansion or division of the stars (Harness xxiv). According to Hindu belief, the moon passes through each mansion at some point during a month. The Naksatras store and transfer *karma* for individuals, and represent the consequences of their actions on earth (Harness xvi). Hindu rituals and ceremonies such as weddings are only carried out if the Naksatras indicate an appropriate time. When an individual is making predictions for upcoming events, there are characteristics of the 27 groups of stars that should be taken into account. In Hinduism each Naksatra has certain powers related to a particular god or planet. Some groups of Naksatras are male oriented, while others are female (Harness xxiv). Lastly, the Naksatras represent the three qualities of life, Sattva (harmony), Rajas (high energy) and Tamas (dullness and darkness) (Harness xxiv). The combination of these characteristics helps decide what is to come. In addition to these static groups of Hindu divine beings, it is also believed there are also gods and goddess in constant motion around the zodiac. These beings are referred to as Grahas (Charak 10). They are thought to move west to east along the zodiac. There are nine of them: the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Rahu, and Ketu (Charak 10). The Sun and the Moon serve as the most significant and powerful planets, while Rahu and Ketu are simply particular points on the zodiac.

In Hindu astrology the Naksatras and Grahas are strongly connected with 12 signs or Rashi along the zodiac, which represent existence (Charak 11). Throughout the day, six signs will rise above the eastern horizon and the other six will rise at night along the western horizon (Charak 19). Each sign is called a house, and is supposed to represent an aspect of existence. For example, the first house, also known as *lagna*, signifies the Sun and one's own character - the way an individual chooses to live their life (Charak 84). Other houses include materialism, family, education, karma, obstacles in life, desires, status of a woman, religious wisdom,

professionalism, acquisition, and loss (Charak 84-86). In Hindu astrology individuals read these houses to understand how they should conduct their everyday lives, rituals and religious ceremonies.

The Sun and Moon are two of the most significant forces in Hindu astrology. Both are associated with extremely powerful gods and are believed to hold great influence over the universe. The Sun is often referred to as Atman (Divine self), and is represented by the god Surya (Behari 40). According to the Vedas, the Sun was granted the power to create and destroy life. The name Loka Chakshu, “the Eye of the World” is given to the Sun because it watches all activity in the universe (Behari 39). According to Hindu belief it creates matter, and nurtures it while being a part of it. In today’s Hindu culture, spiritual healing rituals are centered on the power of the sun. As well, an individual’s experiences are directly affected by their relationship with the Sun. In Hindu mythology the Sun God, Surya symbolizes success and power. His relationship with women is vast, and represents cosmic expansion (Behari 43). He and his wife Sanja have many children; however he also conceives many illegitimate children. He creates many gods including, Yama, the god of death, which essentially brings about the end of life (Behari 43). The horoscope connected with the sun has to do with quality of life and the cosmic energy that flows through an individual (Behari 48). Hindus believe that the Sun is the motivating factor to match your internal desires with your external life (Behari 48).

According to Hindu astrology the Moon is a mysterious and complex Grahas. It is known as the “cosmic mother” and is represented by the goddess Chandrama (Behari 50). The moon is thought to influence emotions and provides goals that are to be achieved. The rays of light emitted by the moon are important to the lotus flower, a significant symbol in Hindu culture. They are able to guide the flower out of the mud and allow it to flourish. This

symbolizes the moon's ability to guide individuals down a path of purity and liberation (Behari 51). The phases of the moon are found within everyday life as well. The different phases have relevance to a woman's body cycle as well as sexual impulses of both males and females (Behari 53). Meditation and rituals are connected with each phase of the moon (Behari 53). It serves as the creator of goals and emotions.

Hindu astrology is quite complex and detailed. The universe is always in motion, and individual lives are constantly changing. Unlike western cultures, horoscopes and astronomy readings are taken seriously when planning events and rituals. Hindu symbols are significant both in ritual teachings and everyday life.

## **REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READINGS**

Behari, Bepin (2003) *Myths & Symbols of Vedic Astrology*. Bangalore: Lotus Press

Harness, Dennis (1999) *The Nakshatras: The Lunar Mansion of Vedic Astrology*. Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press

Charak, K.S. (2002) *Elements of Vedic Astrology*. Unknown city: Institute of Vedic Astrology

Gibson, Lynne (2002) *Hinduism*. Unknown City: Heinemann

### **Related Topics for Further Investigation**

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### **Noteworthy Websites Related to the Topic**

<http://www.vedicscholar.com/>

<http://www.councilvedicastrology.org/Jaimini.htm>

<http://www.articlesbase.com/education-articles/vedic-astrology-vi-62470.html>

<http://www.jyothishi.com/articles.htm>

<http://www.circlesoflight.com/vedic-astrology/vedic-mercury.shtml>

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