



ISSN: 2456-4427

Impact Factor: RJIF: 5.11

Jyotish 2019; 4(2): 19-24

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www.jyotishajournal.com

Received: 15-05-2019

Accepted: 20-06-2019

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International Journal of Jyotish Research (वेदचक्षु)

Understanding Jyotisha astrology I: Theoretical aspects as a holistic spiritual science

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Abstract

Jyotisha expounds deep understanding of Vedic sciences of the soul. It is considered the supreme spiritual science, and is known in the Vedic literature as the ‘Science of the Sciences’, it illuminates the soul’s progress on the path of Sanatana Dharma. This paper shows how the structure of Jyotisha illustrates the Chaturvidha Purushardha, the four-fold aims or goals of life, *Dharma – Artha – Kama – Moksha*. It enables expert Jyotishis to evaluate a soul’s subtle energies, merits and demerits, and so assist a native on the path to *Moksha*. The paper thus emphasizes how the structure of the *Jyotisha Kundali* offers deep insights into the nature and theory of *Dharma*. The *Kundali* indicates at each point in time the nature of active *Prarabda Karma* dominating a person’s life. Correctly used, *Jyotisha* implements the principle, “*Heyam Dukham Anagatam*”, Avert the Danger Yet to Come. Of fundamental importance in life are the influences of the *Chaya Grahas, Rahu and Ketu*, which carry forward *Vasanas* from previous *Janmas*. *Jyotisha* thus presents a perspective of supreme wisdom which, when wisely used, can solve problems, help the native avoid suffering, and advance the soul to spiritual fulfilment.

Keywords: Jyotisha, soul, dharma, Artha, Kama, moksha

Introduction

India’s ancient Vedic Sciences are often considered the height of mankind’s intellectual achievements [1]. Supreme among them is Adishankara Shankaracharya’s system of Advaita Vedanta [2], based on his celebrated commentaries on Bhagavad Gita [3], Brahma Sutras [4-6] and Upanishads [7]. Some hail it as the supreme philosophical achievement of mankind [8-10]. Based on the four Vedas and their subordinate Upavedas, the six limbs of the Veda, the Vedangas, and their six subordinate limbs, or Upangas, the Vedic Sciences are similarly hailed as a supreme system of knowledge [11], originating in the cognitions of the Vedic Rishis, or seers.

Of these Vedic Sciences, one stands out [12] in that it is known as the ‘Science of Sciences’ [13]. The sixth Vedanga, *Jyotisha*, presents a detailed account of both the life, and the journey, of each soul. Its structure implicitly sets out the context for souls’ development, while the predictions it makes of life events show how such development materialises in a given lifetime. This paper is concerned with the first, ‘life of the soul’, aspect, while its sequel, will more concern *Jyotisha*’s prediction of events in each life’s journey.

Jyotisha implicitly explains how the unbounded, infinite creative intelligence of nature is able to direct and coordinate all events on our planet Earth [14]. As a spiritual science it is supreme, because it elucidates the progress of the soul on its path from generation by the Divine Being, *Ishwara*, to supreme fulfilment in the state of *Moksha*, spiritual liberation. This path, laid out in the ancient system of *Sanatana Dharma* [15], is central to the Vedic sciences of the soul given in the Vedic literature.

Sanatana Dharma describes the path of the soul as a transformation from dualistic states of suffering to non-dualistic states of bliss and fulfilment [16]. As it progresses, the soul gains increasing abilities that accumulate over many lifetimes. To expound the soul’s progress through successive incarnations, the Vedic literature uses terms that are nigh untranslatable into European languages, the *Chaturvidha Purushardha: Dharma – Artha – Kama – Moksha* [15]. Each concept presents deep insights into the relationship between the soul and its creator. Overall, the *Purushardhas* epitomize the nectar-like essence of Vedic philosophy.

This foundation paper presents *Jyotisha* astrology as a Holistic Spiritual Science. It treats the interrelated structure of these four concepts, explaining the theory behind them,

and showing how *Jyotisha* helps understand them. In the process, it shows how *Jyotisha* helps people achieve them, and how it can guide humanity into states of higher evolution. In *Sanatana Dharma*, all souls are regarded as aspects of the Divine, created before the beginning of time, and rising through successive states of greater mental, emotional and intellectual ability during the course of their experience of life or lifetimes on earth^[15, 16]. Incarnation is an opportunity for the education of the soul, thereby adding to its *Chit*, the accumulated sum of all its experiences. Eventually, through development of both perception and comprehension of the nature of life, the soul can clearly grasp the validity of truths presented in texts like Bhagavad Gita, such as where Lord Krishna declares, “He who sees all beings in Me, and Me in all beings, he is not lost to Me, nor I to him”^[17]. Intrinsic to *Jyotisha* is its capability to assist souls in their progress on paths to spiritual fulfilment.

Jyotisha intrinsically shows how Nature’s Infinite Intelligence is reflected in ongoing processes in our finite world. The Vedic literature embodies this in the saying “*Anoraniyan Mahatomahiyam*”^[18], from the smaller than the smallest to the larger than the largest (is the Infinite Creative Intelligence found). A similar statement was given in ancient western tradition, “As above, So below”^[19] (Sanskrit, “*Yata pinde, tata Brahmande*”^[20]), implying that what occurs here on earth precisely reflects what happens in the heavens above. Indeed, that precise encapsulates *Jyotisha* astrology, which holds that every event on earth correlates with, and is predictable from, positions and motions of the *Navagrahas*^[21].

The primary concern of *Jyotisha* is thus the Soul^[22]. It works on subtle levels using phenomena unknown on gross levels of manifestation. In modern western studies, the only example where ‘Remote Viewing’^[23] is considered possible, is parapsychology. Even there it is regarded as rare, an extraordinary ability, highly desired for misuse by immoral people^[24].

To estimate a soul’s level, *Jyotisha* evaluates its subtle energies and tendencies, its merits and demerits. Through such soul properties *Jyotisha* predicts major events in a person’s life, and says what steps may be taken to avoid them, if possible – something it can also evaluate.

Traditionally in the Vedic civilization, *Jyotisha* was at the heart of family life. Every newborn baby was taken to the family *Guru* soon after birth, to be given blessings^[25] and to clarify the child’s *Dharma*, or path in life. She or he would expound the path, if necessary using the baby’s *Janmakundali*, birth chart. Otherwise, he would simply use his ability of *Jyotishmati Pragyā*, the *Siddhi* enabling a person to see events at great distances, or in the past or future. Either way, the *Guru* would ‘see’ the *Dharma* of the newborn’s soul, and the various *karmas* that would fructify in its life^[26]. He would inform the parents how to guide their child in the best possible ways to maximize its achievements, *Kama*, on all levels, material and spiritual, thus increasing progress on its path of return to the Divine. *Jyotishmati Pragyā*^[27], the *Siddhi* embodying the ability to see events at great distances, or in the past or future, takes long *Sadhana* for most people to master. For *Jyotishis*, *Jyotisha* practice helps it develop.

The Kundali

The Vedic civilisation was dedicated to furthering *Dharma*^[28], the continuous progress seen in the world^[29], originating in the Infinite Creative Intelligence of nature, and the creativity, that He/She has bestowed on created souls. The structure of the *Kundali*^[30], or astrological chart, in *Jyotisha*

gives deep insight into the nature and theory of *Dharma*. The *Kundali*’s twelve *Bhavas* (houses) are divided in 4 triplets, one each for *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha*^[31]. The *Dharma* triplet^[32] presents spiritual nature and tendencies. The *Artha* triplet^[33] presents prescribed activities and achievements that bring progress in life, e.g. wealth; the *Kama* triplet^[34] yields insights into aspirations and desires to fulfil; while the *Moksha* triplet^[35], presents feasibility of attaining spiritual liberation, *Moksha*, in this life.

The *Kundali* thus presents deep structures in life like fundamental tendencies, repeated patterns, etc. Also indicated are dangers and vulnerability, diseases, accidents, and problems like debt^[36]. Most importantly, it presents probable timings of specific events^[37].

Karma: source of the Kundali’s properties and predictions

The concept of *Karma* in the Vedic sciences is central to the overall system of *Sanatana Dharma*. It plays a foundational role, as the fundamental reason why a soul takes birth, or continues its present incarnation. It explains a person’s tendencies of personality, abilities, profession, and how their life unfolds with the passing of time. As a soul’s lifetimes unfold, he or she gains higher levels of various abilities including spiritual potentiality. These are put to use in future lives, making the soul’s lifetimes increasingly rich with the passage of time.

Karma shows up in a person’s *Janmakundali* through the influence of successive *Grahas* in the system of *Vimshottari Dasa-Bhuktis* (major periods and minor periods)^[38]. Together with *Graha Gochara* (transits)^[39], these lead to detailed predictions of current events in a person’s life. Competent *Jyotishis* are therefore always aware of the dates of forthcoming transitions of *Grahas* from *Rashi* to *Rashi*, and *Nakshatra* to *Nakshatra* etc.^[39, 40] Such information enables the *Jyotishi* to fulfil the danger-averting principle of *Heyam Dukham Anagatam*^[41].

The Vedic Sciences divide *Karma* into three parts^[42, 43]. First, *Prarabda Karma*, representing the fruit of past actions, *Karma* active in this lifetime^[42]; second, *Sanchita Karma*, that which we accumulate in this life, which will fructify in future, and be experienced then^[43]; and third, *Agami Karma*, the store of *Karma* from previous lives that will fructify in future lifetimes but not in this one^[42-44]. According to the tradition of Vedic wisdom, these last two kinds of *Karma*, *Sanchita Karma* and *Agami Karma*, can be annulled by actions in the present life, “The seeds (*beeja*) of future actions can be roasted”^[45]. That is a major purpose of advanced stages of *Yoga* practised by high-level aspirants on the path to *Moksha*.

In light of the above, we can now proceed to an exposition of the *Chaturvidha Purushardhas*.

Dharma

Dharma is primary, sustaining the other three components of *Chaturvidha Purushardha*. The auspicious *Trikona Bhavas*, Houses 1, 5 and 9, of a *Kundali* present the overall picture of *Dharma* at the epoch time. *Prathama Bhava*, *Lagna Bhava*, concerns the holistic state at that time^[46]. *Panchama Bhava*, presents influences from the past on the process; *Navama Bhava*, how the spiritual world may help unfold it.

Regarding *Lagna Bhava*, Brihat Parashara Hora Shastra (BPHS) states (BPHS 12.2)

देहं रूपं च ज्ञानं च वर्णं चैव बलावलम् ।

सुखं दुःखं स्वभावञ्च लग्नभावाच्चिरीक्षयेत् ॥ २ ॥

Meaning: Physique, complexion of the body, appearance, vigour, weakness, intellect, happiness, grief and innate nature are all to be divined from the *Lagna Bhäva*.

Regarding *Panchama Bhava*, concerning influence of past *karmas* [47], BPHS says (BPHS 12.6)

यन्मन्त्रौ तथा विद्यां बुद्धेश्चैव प्रबन्धकम् ।

पुत्रराज्यापभ्रांशादीन् पश्येत् पुत्रालयाद् बुधः ॥ ६ ॥

Meaning: The learned deduce from *Bhäva 5* amulets, sacred spells, learning, knowledge, sons, royalty (or authority), fall of position etc.

Regarding *Bhava 9*, named for *Dharma* [48] itself, BPHS says (BPHS 12.10)

भाग्यं श्यालं च धर्मं च भ्रातृपत्न्यादिकास्तथा ।

तीर्थयात्रादिकं सर्वं धर्मस्थानान्निरीक्षयेत् ॥ १० ॥

Meaning: Religion, visits to shrines, and good luck, wife's brother and brother's wife, etc. are told from *Dharma Bhäva*.

BPHS Chapters 13, 17, 21 further elaborate on *Bhavas 1, 5* and *9* respectively.

Artha

The second *Purushardha*, *Artha*, 'Wealth' is governed by *Bhavas 2, 6* and *10*. The *Bhava 2*, *Dhana Bhava*, governs inherited wealth and family qualities [49]. The *Bhava 6*, *Dusthana*, *Nashta Bhava*, concerns opposition that may arise, due to enemies, deficiencies in resources, poor control, etc. [50] *Bhava 10*, *Karma Bhava*, the House of Action, indicates the means by which a project can generate resources, etc. [51] More generally, *Artha* means 'rewards for efforts', e.g. spiritual progress, generation of finance, expansion and advance, and special awards.

Regarding *Bhäva 2*, BPHS states (BPHS 12.3)

धनधान्यं कुटुम्बांश्च मृत्युजालममित्रकम् ।

धातुरत्नादिकं सर्वं धनस्थानान्निरीक्षयेत् ॥ ३ ॥

Meaning: *Dhana Bhäva (2)* concerns wealth including precious stones and metals, family, food (including grains etc.), death etc. Also, it is the first *māraka sthāna*.

Regarding *Bhäva 6*, BPHS says (BPHS 12.7)

मातुलान्तकशंकाणां शत्रुश्चैव व्रणादिकान् ।

सपत्नीमातरं चापि षष्ठभावात्निरीक्षयेत् ॥ ७ ॥

Meaning: *Bhäva 6 (Ari Bhava)* indicates enemies, disease, debts, mother's brother(s), step-mother, fear of death, etc.

Regarding *Bhäva 10*, BPHS says (BPHS 12.11)

राज्यं चाकाशवृत्तिं च मानं चैव पितृस्तथा ।

प्रवासस्य ऋणस्यापि व्योमस्थानान्निरीक्षणम् ॥ ११ ॥

Meaning: *Bhäva 10 (Karma Bhäva)* indicates profession (livelihood), positions of authority and honours, father, place of residence, e.g. living abroad.

BPHS Chapters 14, 18, 22 further elaborate *Bhavas 2, 6*, and *10*, respectively.

The pattern of Jyotisha reveals that wealth, in the sense of personal and family prosperity, is something that comes to a person as a result of *Karmic* merits gained over past lives, an idea illustrated by the proverb, "As you sow, so shall you reap". As a soul incarnates in successive lifetimes, its level of merit tends to increase. The maturing of a soul in *Sanatana Dharma* will bring it enough wealth, *Artha*, to fulfil desires from previous lives. Professional success, as indicated by *Bhava 10*, represents the means to fulfil them. It brings the soul to *Sanatana Dharma's* next stage, and is an integral part of the overall path to *Moksha*.

KAMA

The *Kama Bhavas*, houses of attainments, are numbers *3, 7*, and *11*. The third *Bhava*, for which *Kuja Graha* is *Sahaja karaka* (natural significator), indicates the boldness and drive of those leading the project [52]. The *Bhava 7*, with *Sukra* as *Sahaja karaka*, indicates partners [53]. *Bhava 11*, *Labhasthana*, the 'House of Gain', is fundamental to an endeavour's success [54]. Strength therein is essential for a project's success.

Regarding *Bhäva 3*, BPHS says (BPHS 12.4)

विक्रमं भृत्यभ्रात्रादि चोपदेशप्रयाणकम् ।

पित्रोर्वै मरणं विज्ञो दुश्चिन्त्याच्च निरीक्षयेत् ॥ ४ ॥

Meaning: *Bhäva 3 (sahaja / bhrätâ bhäva)* indicates valour, younger brothers and sisters, Servants, *upadeça*, Journeys, Death of Parents, etc.

Regarding *Bhäva 7*, BPHS says (BPHS 12.8)

जायामध्वप्रयाणं च वाणिज्यं नष्टवीक्षणम् ।

मरणं च स्वदेहस्य जायाभावान्निरीक्षयेत् ॥ ८ ॥

Meaning: *Bhäva 7 (Yuvati / Kalatra bhäva)* indicates business partners and trade, travel, loss of sight, etc. Also, as the second *Māraka Sthāna*, termination of a project.

Regarding *Bhäva 11*, BPHS says (BPHS 12.12)

नानावस्तुभवस्यापि पुत्रजायादिकस्य च ।

आयं वृद्धिं पशूनां च भवस्थानान्निरीक्षणम् ॥ १२ ॥

Meaning: *bhäva 11 (läbha bhäva)* indicates all articles, daughters-in-law, income, prosperity, domesticated animals, e.g. cows and pets, etc.

Chapters 15, 19, 23 of BPHS further elaborate on *bhäva 3, 7* and *11*, respectively.

These aspects of *Kama Bhavas* are often lost when discussing *Moksha*. *Sannyäsa* alone is often thought sufficient, but *Jyotisha* shows that the *Grihasta Ashrama*, fulfilling aspirations in this world, is integral to the path. The *Kama Bhavas* provide the soul strength to succeed in achieving them, enabling it to progress to the stage on the path where

renunciation naturally sets in. Then it can aim for a higher level of achievement, *Moksha*, liberation.

Jyotisha thus emphasizes an aspect of *Sanatana Dharma* often lost in obsession with *Moksha*, for which *Sanyasa*, is usually thought the sole means. It illustrates the point that, until the native's desires, aspirations and ambitions have been fulfilled in the relative world, the soul's destiny in the Absolute beyond all relative planes of existence cannot be attained^[55]. The *Kama Bhavas* provide the means to fulfil lower aspirations. Only then can the soul move on, and aspire to things of a less ephemeral nature, and attain a permanent state in the beyond.

Moksha

The *Moksha Bhavas* are Houses 4, 8 and 12. *Bhava* 4, *Matru Bhava*, concerns qualities of heart and capacity to love God^[56]; *Bhava* 8, *Ayurbhava*, indicates longevity, powers of subtle perception and action, and overall limitations^[57]; *Bhava* 12, *Vyaya Bhava*, indicates loss of anything pertaining to a project, including *Karma*. A person's potential for *Moksha*, spiritual liberation, can therefore be read from it^[58].

Bhava 4 with *Chandra* as *Sahajakaraka* governs heart, love, and mother; *Bhava* 8, concerning transformation, has *Sani* as *Sahajakaraka*; *Bhava* 12, the 'House of Loss', *Vyaya Sthana*, with *Ketu* as *Sahajakaraka*, governs loss including loss of a person's three kinds of *Karma*. From the Yoga perspective, *Tapas* and *Sadhana* destroy these, bringing *Moksha*.

Regarding *Bhava* 4, BPHS says (BPHS 12.5)

वाहनान्यथ बन्धुंश्च मातृसौख्यादिकान्यपि ।

निधि क्षेत्रं गृहं चापि चतुर्थात् परिचिन्तयेत् ॥ ५ ॥

Meaning: *bhava* 4 (*Matru Bhava*) indicates mother, vehicles, relatives, mother, happiness, treasure, lands and buildings.

Regarding *Bhava* 8, BPHS says (BPHS 12.9)

आसु रणं रिपुं चापि दुर्गं मृतघनं तथा ।

गत्यनुकादिकं सर्वं पश्येद्रन्नाद्विचक्षणः ॥ ९ ॥

Meaning: *Bhava* 8 (*Randhra Bhava*) indicates longevity, battle, enemies, forts, wealth of the dead, things that have happened, and things yet to happen, i.e. births, past and future.

Regarding *Bhava* 12, BPHS states (BPHS 12.13)

व्ययं च वैरिवृत्तान्तरिः फमन्त्यादिकं तथा ।

व्ययाच्चैष हि ज्ञातव्यमिति सर्वत्र धीमता ॥ १३ ॥

Meaning: *Bhava* 12 (*Vyaya Bhava*) indicates expenses, history of enemies, one's own death etc. Prosperity, or Annihilation of a *Bhava*

In terms of *Karma*, *Moksha* means annulment of *Agami* and *Sancita Karmas*, by e.g. devotion to God, yoga meditation etc. When action is in accordance with Natural Law, *Sancita Karma* is no more created. Allowing God's Will to direct all one's actions leads to *Moksha*. In *Bhagavad Gita*, actions in accordance with Natural Law are implicitly illustrated by Arjuna having Lord Krishna as his charioteer^[59]. The horses are said to symbolise the organs of action^[60], so having Lord

Krishna holding the reins implies that all Arjuna's actions are directed by the Will of God.

BPHS Chapters 16, 20, 24 further elaborate on *Bhavas* 4, 8 and 12 respectively.

Discussion/further considerations

A fundamental idea in *Jyotisha* is that all *Bhavas* are equally important in judging the strength of a *Kundali*. Any one of them can have a key influence on its strength or weakness, and play a major role in possible outcomes. Of course, the strength of the *Lagna* does have implications for the whole *Kundali*. Its strength can help guarantee positive outcomes for the process being considered, while weakness will have the opposite effect. The *Dusthana Bhavas* are all in the *Artha – Moksha* pair of triplets. If one *Dusthana* is strong, the whole triplet is dragged down. *Rahu* has inauspicious results similar to *Dusthanas*, except that it will drag down a whole triplet, e.g. towards values of materialism Its partner, *Ketu*, on the other hand, will tend to advance a soul on the path to *Moksha*, for which it is *Karaka*. Generally, each *Graha*'s results are signified by the *Bhava* it occupies and the *Bhavas* of the *Graha* in whose *Nakshatra* it is posited at the epoch time, subject to other influences.

A very significant aspect of the *Kundali* is that it can be understood to reflect the overall, unified nature of existence asserted in *Advaita Vedanta*. The ancient *Risis* realized that each *Purushardha* in itself presents a goal of life that the soul must realize in order to attain final fulfilment. They can be summarized as follows.

- The *Dharma Bhavas*, 1, 5 and 9, concern the soul's path and overall purpose.
- The *Artha Bhavas*, 2, 6 and 10, concern capabilities needed to fulfil that *Dharma*.
- The *Kama Bhavas*, 3, 7 and 11 represent rewards that bring the soul satisfaction, motivating it to progress further on its journey.
- The *Moksha Bhavas*, 4, 8 and 12 indicate how the soul achieves enlightenment.

This sequence of four *Purushardhas* is repeated 3 three times in the cycle of 12 *Bhavas*:

- The first Set of four, *Bhavas* 1 to 4, concerns the Knower him / herself.
- The second Set of four, *Bhavas* 5 to 8, concerns the Process of Knowing.
- The third Set of four, *Bhavas* 9 to 12, concerns the Known, including the Ultimate.

Thus, the three Sets of Four together, i.e. the Whole *Kundali*, *Bhavas* 1 to 12, present the Wholeness of Knower, Process of Knowing and Known, the overall, Unified Structure of Reality according to *Advaita Vedanta*.

Conclusion

In these various ways, *Jyotisha* presents a perspective of supreme wisdom that can be wisely used to avoid problems and suffering, *Heyam Dukham Anagatam*, and help the soul advance to spiritual fulfilment. Its title in the Vedic literature of being, 'The Science of Sciences'¹³, is fully justified. No other science lays out all aspects of the paths of *Sanatana Dharma* so clearly, with the central concepts so well delineated.

Conflict of Interest

None of the authors has a conflict of interest to declare.

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