

Whipping astrology – a science crime

I find it more disturbing now to read the responses¹⁻⁷ to my letter on astrology (*Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **80**). More disturbing because most responses seem to attribute to my article issues that I do not subscribe to, and in the process there is continued whipping of astrology on the wrong side. Whether or not astrology can predict (and I have never vouched on this in my article but the whipholders seem to have more confidence than I have in its predictive power!), my prediction has come to be very true. I had written that any appeal for a serious and an unbiased study of the ancient Indian scientific developments will be 'straight-away rejected as an useless rambling'. The lynching mob has done exactly that¹. They write: 'We do not want to waste our time... in rebutting point by point the long *rambling* letter'. Happily enough, irrespective of the mode in which astrology will be studied, a few science conformists seem to agree that it can be studied as arts and history⁵⁻⁷. Again, a predicted move of the conformists known for their sluggish change.

Now to more serious issues: I find that there are three major issues raised in the rejoinders. One by one to them.

- It has been argued that when UGC is constrained by the resources for higher education, introducing astrology is an inappropriate step and 'investing public money or resources on (such) activities... is very unwise and wasteful'³. I guess the Indian scientific community in general has not got the ethical strength to make such suggestions. Let me recall the statistics by Arunachalam on the resources⁸, both human and financial, invested in the

research institutes. He shows that our efforts in medical research are more directed towards the priorities determined by the western health problems and that the most serious Indian diseases are almost neglected. Whom are we questioning on the wisdom of spending? Now the 'serious scientists' may turn to defend by bringing in the freedom for science – and that has been my argument as well in imparting education.

- It has been argued that introduction of astrology is not appropriate as science but fine as arts⁵⁻⁷! I find it funny. For me there are only two categories: Sensible information base and nonsense. It is immaterial whether or not the good knowledge base is arts or science. In fact today we have scientific principles applied to distinguish between the patterns of writing by Shakespeare and those by others. History that was once an arts subject is almost subjected to scientific methodology especially in archeology-based history. Science was once taught as natural philosophy. What do we consider today the subject of philosophy and psychology as sciences or arts? I urge these authors to ask their kids in primary, middle, and high schools about the subjects they are studying: **Moral Sciences, Social Sciences, Political Sciences...!!** Why did all these scientists not raise any voice against the introduction of these subjects? Because they all came directly from the West as a teaching package to our kids?

In my view the information *per se* does not make it science or arts. Info is info

irrespective of these stigmas but, science differs from the rest in the methodology applied to test the validity of, and or, to arrive at the knowledge. Therefore, instead of suggesting a full stop for teaching astrology let us propose the ways and clauses to be followed while teaching it.

- All the authors of the rejoinders appear to be setting a crow – that I believe in astrological predictions and, are rejoicing in shooting it down. This is evident for example from the challenge that Lakshmana Rao⁴ offers, using statistics from Hiroshima. This unfortunate mix up seems to be due to an unwarranted hurry in burying astrology. In fact I have never stated in my article that we should study astrology for its predictions; I also oppose UGC on this ground because they seem to use this as one of the arguments. But throwing away the baby with the bathwater is no solution. My appeal has been to consider the possibilities that these subjects have issues different from what the scientifically trained eyes can see, especially because these knowledge-bases have accumulated in a format different from the way we practice science⁹.

There are a few specific issues and examples the rejoinders raise and I wish to respond to them equally specifically:

- M. R. N. Murthy wonders if a self-respecting scientist can test the efficacy of applying goat intestine mix to cure a skin disease. I am rather confused as to what he refers to here. Is it the ugliness of the sight of

CORRESPONDENCE

the treatment or the idea? I am sure Jenner was a more self respecting scientist than some of us and he did not hesitate to test the possibility that the dirty hands of the milk maid perhaps had solution for small pox and in fact injected his own family with what was easily abhorred as dirty by the then colleagues! Closed mind is not a good scientific temperament and I am sure all my friends agree with that. Further, I am sure M.R.N. Murthy, has a lot of respect for Sir Francis Galton who seriously studied effect of prayers¹⁰.

- My citing of C.R. Rao has been equated to stating that he believes in astrology¹. I wish my article was read properly. I am only stating that there are a range of less scrutinized data sets that could be used to support astrology and hence to ascertain that these do not misguide, we need to indulge in a justified study. Further, I do not think that the issue can be settled by citing whether or not luminaries such as C.V. Raman, Vivekananda, Guru Nanak and C. R. Rao believed in astrology. *Hindu* carried a series of articles suggesting that their beliefs are very ambiguous. And MKC² also offers a

good set of examples of how great souls had their own beliefs. All these do not prove or disprove anything.

In the morning of the day I received the 10 May issue of *Current Science* carrying the rejoinders to my article, I had read a news item. Taliban forces, after demolishing the non-conformist statues of Buddhism, had passed a fresh dictum that all the Hindus in Afghanistan who do not conform to their religious code of dressing would be lynched in public. After reading all the violent attacks on my article, I felt there is a lot of coincidence between the two attacks – fundamental: fundamentalists attacking non-conformists.

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Correspondence on this subject is closed.

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