

Book Reviews

Horoscope Guide
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***In Search of Destiny: Biography, History and Culture As Told Through Vedic Astrology*, by Edith Hathaway, Vintage Vedic Press, San Diego, California, 2012. 544 pages, \$29.95.**

Vedic astrology, or Jyotisa (the actual Sanskrit term for the study of astronomy, astrology, and mathematics), which is utilized in India and is based on the sidereal zodiac, has seen a revival in the west over the last 25 years, and has resulted in a flurry of texts by Western astrologers. Most of them began their studies of astrology with the western tropical zodiac, and have since gone on to either switch to the sidereal zodiac and Vedic astrological system, or to use both systems side by side.

Because of this, many of the Vedic astrology books written by Western astrologers are actually quite accessible even if you do not know the tools that Vedic astrology uses, which are quite different from those used in Western astrology. As to those differences, suffice it to say that the planets, signs, and houses, have similar meanings, though they do veer into areas of life that are often different from Western astrology. Mars, for instance, rules siblings in Indian astrology whereas Mercury rules this relationship in Western astrology. The 9th house represents the father in Vedic astrology, whereas in Western astrology, either the 10th house or the 4th house can rule the father. The zodiacal signs, known in Sanskrit as *rasis*, are practically identical in both systems, except for some minor variations mostly due to cultural differences.

In her brilliant new book, *In Search of Destiny*, Edith Hathaway, a Western and Vedic astrologer for more than 30 years, uses Vedic astrology to explain historical cycles as well as to analyze in great detail 31 charts of famous people. Even if you are a novice to Vedic astrology, her approach will help you not only to understand the system, but to see how Vedic astrology actually works in action. In fact, her biographical accounts of these celebrities, which all commendably use reliable birth data (“AA” and “A” and sometimes “B” ratings from Lois Rodden’s Astrodatbank.com) can actually be used to analyze a chart in any system, since they are methodically presented and are illustrated with actual life events.

The first chapter, “Historical Context and Collective Destiny” is a brilliant tour de force in explaining the Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions from 1405-2398 from the perspective of the sidereal zodiac. Hathaway begins with a brief explanation of the Indian *yugas*, or eras, and explains the precession of the equinoxes so that the Western reader will understand the difference between the tropical and sidereal zodiacs. Although the Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions, which occur every twenty years, were noted by Arabic astrologers as far back as the first millennium, and also by Indian astronomers, in recent years American astrologers have focused on their significance mostly in terms of Tecumseh’s curse, or the fact that the U.S. presidents who were elected in 1840, 1860,

1880, 1900, 1920, 1940, and 1960, all died in office. Of course since Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, who were elected in 1980 and 2000 (years marked by a Jupiter-Saturn conjunction), did not die in office (though Reagan was seriously wounded by a would-be assassin's bullet), the curse, if there ever was one, has seemingly been broken.

Hathaway, however, focuses on the events that happened during the period of 20 years marked by each Jupiter-Saturn conjunction, showing that there is much more to say about the distinct cycles and patterns that give them significance, instead of just looking at the death of U.S presidents. In the first place, she considers the sidereal zodiacal elements in which they occur, as a way of defining each 20-year cycle. Viewing it this way shows the distinct difference in analyzing, for instance, the period from December 31, 1980 - May 28, 2000, as one represented by the Jupiter-Saturn conjunction falling in sidereal Virgo, an Earth sign, rather than in tropical Libra, an Air sign. Additionally she places great significance on seeing the *nakshatra*, or lunar mansion, in which the conjunction occurs, since the 27 *nakshatras*, or mansions of the Moon, were used by the Indians who divided the stars into groups before the zodiac became part of their astrology. When writing about the Earth-sign dominant period from 1921-2199, she writes:

Though its focus is on material security, the EARTH cycle often starts out with excesses of personal and collective spending that typically depletes the middle and lower classes, while enriching the very wealthy sector. The 1921 JU-SA conjunction in [sidereal] Virgo was followed by the madcap 1920s, various high-profile financial scandals (the Teapot Dome scandal in the U.S., among others), and then the stock market collapse in October 1929.

Before she moves on to case studies, Hathaway introduces us to Vedic astrology and philosophy in Chapter 2, so that even those who do not know much about the subject will be able to follow Hathaway's explanations. The celebrity charts cover the bulk of the book, and even though there are only 31 such charts, they are thoroughly examined through the use of character analysis, life events, and the cycles in their lives, as represented by the *dashas*, or planetary periods. It is, in fact, these *dashas*, along with their *sub-dashas*, and *sub-sub dashas* (which are based on the *nakshatra* the Moon occupies at the time of birth), that have given Vedic astrology the reputation of being accurate in terms of its ability to predict life's events. Thus Hathaway focuses on these divisions as the key to viewing biography through the lens of Vedic astrology.

She sets up each chapter by *lagna*, or Ascendant, mostly because Vedic astrology is based on a whole-sign house system. This means that no matter where your planets are, everyone who has a Gemini Ascendant will have Mercury as the chart ruler, Cancer as the sign that covers the 2nd house with Moon as its ruler, Leo as the sign that covers the 3rd house with Sun as its ruler, etc. Each chapter begins with a biographical summary, an in-depth character analysis, and the planetary periods of the person's life accompanied by a detailed description of those periods and why they signified certain events. The celebrity list includes: Aries Ascendant - Robert F. Kennedy and Mia Farrow, Taurus Ascendant - Martha Graham and Julia Child, Gemini Ascendant - Albert

Einstein and Steven Spielberg, Cancer Ascendant - Marilyn Monroe and Indira Gandhi, Leo Ascendant - Maya Angelou and Woody Allen, Virgo Ascendant - John F. Kennedy and Barbara Walters, and Libra Ascendant - Adolf Hitler and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Although some of these charts may seem familiar as having been analyzed by Western astrologers ad infinitum, they have never been given as thorough an analysis of character, timing, and destiny as Hathaway gives them using Vedic astrology.

This book is brilliant in the way it conveys historical cycles and biography through Vedic astrology, and it is organized and written in a way that will please both beginners and advanced students, as well as practitioners. My only quibble is that it stops with Libra on the Ascendant. Although this cross-section of celebrities is still a wonderful learning tool, it would have been better in my opinion to have used fewer celebrities for each Ascendant in order to have used all 12 zodiacal signs. This means that if the book covered the same number of pages, the 31 celebrities could have merely been extended to 12 signs, with perhaps three studies for some Ascendants and two for others. Or the book could have been a little longer. Perhaps Hathaway will put out a second volume using notables with Scorpio through Pisces Ascendants. In that case we would see many more examples of her remarkable work. Let's hope so.