

## Astrology: Believe it or not?

A Sitaram



*Astrology: Believe it or not?*

S Balachandra Rao

Navakarnataka

2000, pp.156, Price: Rs. 65/-.

Thanks to the ill-conceived move by the UGC (around May 2001) to introduce astrology courses in Indian universities, this wonderful little book has been rescued from the obscurity that it might have otherwise lapsed into. If only it had received more prominence earlier, Balachandra Rao's book would have done more to debunk and expose the pseudo-science of astrology than all the myriad protest letters from scientists and academics in universities and institutes across the country. Indeed, the reviewer suffers a deep sense of mortification that he voiced his protest only after the introduction of 'vedic astrology' by the UGC as a legitimate subject was more or less a fait accompli, although various newspapers were warning us that the move was imminent. On the other hand, Balachandra Rao's book was published in the year 2000, which surely means that it was completed long before that. Why does one call astrology a pseudo-science? Well, this question is comprehensively answered by Balachandra Rao. Can it be considered as any kind of rational knowledge? No! Once again, Rao explains why not. What one really learns

from this book is that astrology consists of a set of arbitrary rules made up aeons ago. These rules, which have no rational or even empirical basis to back them up, purport to predict how a person's life evolves based on planetary positions at the time of his or her birth. All disciplines should be based on rational thought and astrology is as far removed from rational thought as one can get! Thus, it has absolutely no place in our university education, either in a science department or in a humanities department. If the UGC wants our students to learn something about our heritage, let them introduce courses on various aspects of Indian culture. (It is perhaps important to remind oneself here that 'Indian' is not the same as 'Hindu'.)

Coming back to the book under review, here are some highlights and important aspects of the book: Chapter 1 is a nice introduction to ancient Indian mathematics and astronomy. Chapter 2 is about the origins of Indian astrology and the author presents a lot of evidence to support the view that there is nothing vedic about vedic astrology! After describing various calendars in detail, the author explains carefully in Chapter 13 what exactly a horoscope is and also compares various styles of horoscopes. Ironically enough it is clear from later chapters that these different styles lead to completely different predictions! In Chapters 15 through 19, he explains how horoscopes are used to make predictions by the different schools of thought(!). It is in Chapters 20 through 29 that the author is in his elements, mercilessly

destroying the claims of astrology with the piece-de-resistance being Chapter 29, aptly entitled Time to shun astrology. (The reviewer would seriously like to suggest to the UGC that this portion of the book be made compulsory course material in all universities.) The final chapter, Chapter 33 concludes with quotations from some of the finest minds of our times, Pandit Nehru, Swami Vivekananda and Karl Popper. The author would have done well to add the following quote from one of the most creative minds of all times (– no, not Newton or Einstein but Shakespeare!).

“This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, often the

surfeit of our own behaviour – we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on: an admirable evasion.... .”

To conclude, this book, priced at a modest sixty five rupees, is a must for every college student.

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## The Lady or the Tiger:

### A Review

S P Suresh



*The Lady or the Tiger  
and Other Logic Puzzles*  
Raymond Smullyan  
Oxford University Press  
1987, pp.226.

Inspector Craig has again been called in on a life-saving mission. One of the top-security banks in Monte Carlo (for security reasons the name of the bank is withheld!), has just lost the combination of their biggest safe. (An overzealous clerk has safely deposited the only card containing the combination in the safe and locked it up!) The safe contains

some state documents which must be produced within three months, and blowing the safe open is out of the question.

It is at this point that the readers are invited to join Craig in his hunt for the combination. The only clues available are a set of five rules which define a certain binary relation on the space of possible combinations.

Craig eventually succeeds in finding a combination which opens the lock, but before that he (along with the reader) has a series of fascinating encounters with some number machines invented by his friends Norman McCulloch and Malcolm Fergusson, which amazingly leads him to a combination that opens the safe.

All these encounters involve proving close variants of a famous result in the theory of