

Rational Astrology

The View from the Middle

A CONVERSATION

IN

5

ACTS

For those who are willing to approach any subject rationally,
that is, neither being blindly in favor nor hysterically against...

This is a view from the middle, neither black nor white, but in
shades of gray.

Day 1

Welcome! You just walked in on a conversation between Mr **S**keptic and Ms **B**eliever. Maybe you already know a fair deal about the topic of their discussion; maybe you know nothing at all. Either way, you are here because you are curious about what they are speaking. Yes? – Perhaps, a *little* curious? No, curiosity isn't such a bad thing after all – not for cats, neither for humans. It has yielded us centuries of progress, for good or for bad. So let us join them without further ado, making a mental note to suspend our opinions, keeping aside the little biases and prejudices that we all carry, until we have heard them out.

S *So you are an astrologer – one of those who can read my life and predict what's going to happen to me tomorrow?*

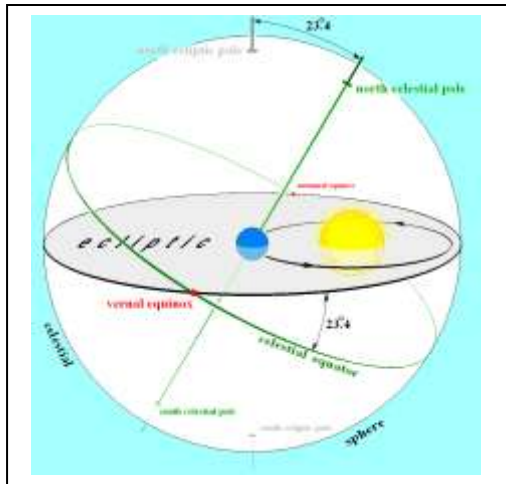
B Actually, no one can *really* predict your future – not me, not any other astrologer, no one. The idea that the future can be precisely foretold implies one of two things – that either I can read your mind, so I know what you are going to do, or that you are a dummy, a puppet, sitting helplessly while someone or something (a supernatural power or fate or what you will) pulling strings does things to you or makes you act in a pre-determined manner, willingly or unwillingly – and both are false as far as we know. There is no evidence that telepathy (mind reading) works, so relax, your private thoughts are safe with you. Equally well, there is no evidence of a supernatural power running (or ruining) your life for you. Indeed, if I were stupid enough to venture a prediction, it would be quite easy for you to prove me wrong. For instance, if I were to predict that you would be out traveling tomorrow, all you need do is lock yourself up at home and stoutly refuse to set foot outside your door. And there! Or, if you prefer the macabre, I could predict a long life for you and just to prove me wrong you could walk into a busy expressway.

S *Ha, ha! No, thank you. But I am glad that for an astrologer you seem to be debunking astrology.*

B Not really. Let me give you a real-life anecdote. A friend's father had been warned by his astrologer that he faced the risk of drowning in the near future. The gentleman was traveling on work and had to cross a river by ferry. The crossing would take less than an hour. The alternative was a winding mountain road that would take 18 hours. As the ferry was about to set off, the astrologer's words came to him, and he insisted on getting off and taking the road. His two colleagues were reluctant but finally agreed and they disembarked with their luggage. The ferry left and shortly after, within their range of vision, it sank and everyone aboard perished. So, when an astrologer "makes a prediction," she is only telling you what possibly lies ahead; the decisions are all yours. There are those who attack astrology by claiming that making predictions means that everything is preordained and hence implies that there is no place for free will. They are completely off course. Just as you seek a financial planner's advice before investing in the stock market, you could get an astrologer's counsel before taking decisions about your life. So you can call me a *life planner* if you wish. And just as there are folks who play the stock market without expert advice, you could run your life without a life planner. Either way, the decisions are yours and yours alone. Astrology does not displace free will.

S *And you claim you can plan my life and forewarn me of dangers lurking ahead by looking at the stars?*

B Kind of, but we will qualify that later. What matters is the position of the planets at the moment of your birth. If you tell me your date of birth, the place of birth and the precise time of birth (within a couple of minutes either way), I can draw up your astrological chart (also called a horoscope). Actually, you could do that yourself using any software freely available on the web. It will show you the positions of the planets, roughly along a plane called the ecliptic plane, in terms of their angular position given by an angle between 0 and 360 degrees. Mind you, this is just plain, simple



astronomy¹ – there are no two ways about it. And you can have your horoscope. What does the horoscope signify? Let me give you an analogy. Imagine a car rally where you turn up with your own car. The organizers give you a map of your route – the map shows you the ups and downs, the highs and the lows, the easy stretches and the bad patches. The horoscope is the route map of your life. It marks out what you may expect at critical junctures of your life. You can choose to junk it and take the rally as it comes, or you can get an astrologer to help you navigate. The choice is yours.

S *Whoa! This raises so many questions. Looks like everyone born on the same date, at the same place, and about the same time will have a common route map. So by comparing their experiences it should be possible to verify or disprove your statement.*

B Yes, but remember that the horoscope does not uniquely determine the future. The car you are driving (your family and upbringing) and the driver (yourself) also matter. Even if two persons have the same horoscope, the values they imbibe and the experiences they have as they grow up influence them and their decisions later in life. Even in the case of twins, with the same family and if you assume an identical upbringing, though they may have shared experiences as children, as they grow up and begin to take their own decisions, obviously their lives will diverge. Astrology takes a holistic view of life including nature, nurture and free will.

S *At this rate, I wonder if you can make any astrological prediction at all. Yet you insist on calling astrology a science... After all, the hallmark of science is the ability to make verifiable predictions.*

B For starters, personally, I am not too concerned about whether astrology is called a science or not. But let me take the bait. You will agree that not all the sciences are the same. Yes, with some of the natural sciences, one can make

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecliptic>

predictions and verify them by repeatable experiments. But as the number of elements involved in the phenomenon increases, as the complexity of their interactions increases, and as the uncertainty of our knowledge about them and about external factors that affect them increases, predictions become increasingly difficult. For example, the weather. Yet we talk of climate *science*. The engineering sciences are full of probabilities and empirical models that we don't really understand, but we use them because "they work." Once you come to sciences dealing with living organisms, predictions become even rarer. For instance, here is a quote from *This is Biology, The Science of the Living World* by Ernst Mayr (1997): "Predictions in biology are at best probabilistic, owing to the great variability of most biological phenomena and owing to the occurrence of contingencies and multiplicity of interacting factors that affect the course of events. For the biologist, it is not so important that his theory survive the test of prediction, it is more important that his theory is useful in solving problems." Predictions are of even lesser importance in medical science – no one goes to a doctor to hear her prediction, they just want to get cured. Predictions are almost impossible when dealing with an intelligent human mind – think of psychology, a science. And if dealing with a single human mind was not daunting enough, consider the *sciences* that deal with the masses – social sciences, political science, and economics. In my personal opinion, an astrologer's "prediction" has a better shot at turning out right than an economist's. Notice how two doctors or two economists can legitimately disagree on the correct course of treatment of a patient or a financial crisis, and there is often no way to settle the issue but to wait it out. If you insist, I would place astrology as a science roughly at par with psychology.

- S** *Be that as it may. You claim to draw up a route map of my life based on the position of the planets at the time of my birth. But scientists have clearly said that there is no way in which the planets can affect any of us living here on Earth. So there is no scientific basis for astrology.*

B Well, firstly astrology does not claim that the planets directly influence our lives. Frankly, we don't know, and if we did in the past, that knowledge has been lost. So right now we can think of the planetary positions as a model that enables us to calculate your life's route map. Finding a scientific basis is going to need research and possibly collaboration between astrologers, natural scientists and medical experts. Secondly, it is not as if scientists have all the answers about their own fields. By their own admission, over 95% of the matter in the universe is not accounted for, and the best we have so far is a wildly speculative story about dark matter and dark energy without a pinch of evidence. Besides when scientists claim that there is no *known* cosmic effect on humans, they are being economical with the truth. The fact is that there are interactions; it is just that they do not *know* much about the effects yet. For instance, it is known that every second we are being bombarded by billions of neutrinos from the sun (solar neutrinos) and from outer space (cosmic neutrinos). These are tiny particles that were assumed to be mass-less and appeared to pass through all matter without any interaction, but some years ago it was discovered that they do possess a very tiny mass, and hence must interact even if feebly with other matter. There may be other effects that we have never figured out so far. So to conclude in haste that there is no cosmic or solar effect on our life is premature and frankly unscientific.

S *Wow! You seem to be well informed about scientific matters, though I doubt whether your argument will cut any ice with the scientific community.*

B As scientists, we are supposed to think rationally. Before we accept or disclaim anything, we are required to examine the evidence impartially and draw our own conclusions objectively. Just as I have read, listened to and thought about other disciplines at length, one would expect other scientists to make an honest attempt to appraise astrology before making up their minds. Sadly most of them seem to succumb to the peer pressure to berate astrology even as they remain totally ignorant about it. I suppose it is

fashionable in some scientific circles to sneer at astrology, but it would be nice to see less arrogance and more humility, less prejudice and more rationality.

S *But, you know, people have conducted scientific studies and shown that astrology does not pass the test.*

B By the same token, I could collect a bunch of scientists and set them a problem to solve. If the majority of them fail, I could conclude that the science itself was flawed. How much sense does that make? Or give a doctor a bunch of blood test reports and ask her to predict how many of them would die of cancer. If she doesn't hit bull's eye (which is very likely), I could conclude that blood tests were worthless. Bad science unfortunately is all too common. It would be so much nicer if these scientists actually bothered to understand astrology before passing judgment. For all you know, they may find a hint or a clue that might show them a way out of an impasse in their own field.

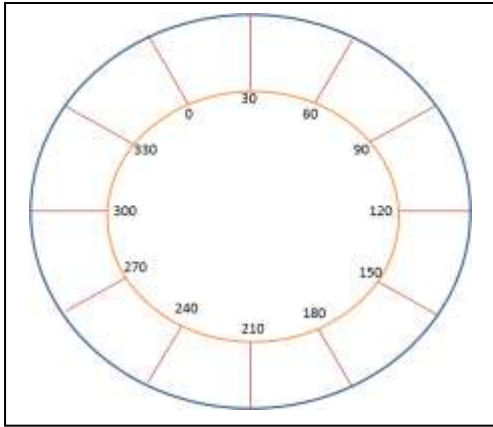
S *I would be very surprised if any of them were to take up your invitation. I am not too convinced either right now but I am sufficiently intrigued by what you say to want to learn more. Can you recommend some reading for me? And I hope to meet you again after I am more 'literate' in your subject.*

B That's nice. I don't expect you to jump ship so soon, but just to keep an open mind. I would recommend the books by the famous Indian astrologer, B V Raman, but, mind you, I don't blindly accept everything that he says in there. And I will be glad to meet with you again and carry this conversation forward.

Day 2

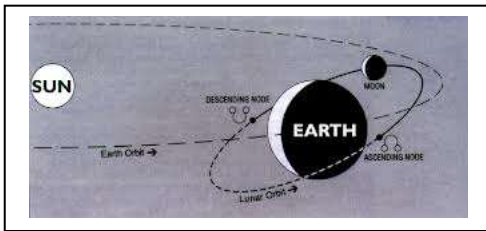
Another day, another setting, same persona – Mr **S**, may be a shade less unbending, and Ms **B**, perhaps not as strident as earlier.

S *Well, I have been reading a lot and thinking quite a bit, but much of this simply does not make sense to me. I am happier dealing with numbers but there is no math in here at all.*



B Ha, ha! That can soon be rectified. Let us start by cutting up the ecliptic plane into boxes of 30 degrees each – that is, 12 boxes in all. You don't really need to do this, but it is a convenience. Here we are, 12 boxes, all marked with the angle in degrees, from 0 to 330. 360 degrees brings us back to 0. Now we ink in the location of the planets between 0 and 360 degrees at the moment of your birth as seen from the place where you were born.

S *I am not sure I am ready to let you unravel my secrets yet. Why don't we work with a friend's horoscope instead?*



B That's somewhat like taking a friend's blood test report to a doctor and asking her for a diagnosis. Anyway, let's humor you for now. You need to tell me the location of the 5 planets – **Mercury**, **Venus**, **Mars**, **Jupiter**, and **Saturn** – and the **Sun**, the **Moon**, and the lunar nodes² (called **Rahu** and **Ketu**). That's 8 of them in all, since **Ra** and **Ke** are always diametrically opposite each other.

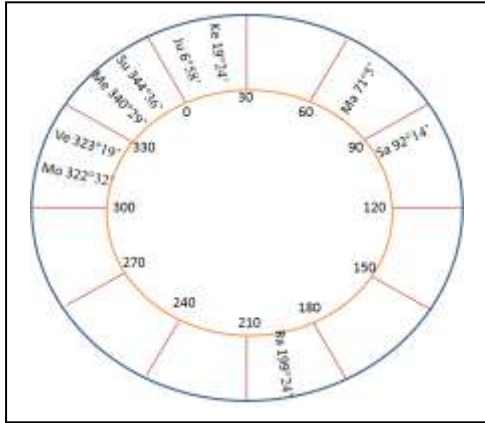
S *What about Uranus and Neptune? And I thought Rahu and Ketu were mythological.*

B My guess is that the visible 7 – **Su**, **Mo**, **Me**, **Ve**, **Ma**, **Ju**, **Sa** – are the dominant factors. Everything else – the outer planets, dwarf planets, satellites, meteors, comets, and the rest – is lumped into a "correction term" which is placed at the lunar nodes. If true, this would be a lovely ancient application of a classical mathematical technique. I think this basic construct

² www.earthview.com/images/46-600.jpg

predates religion and mythology – those I suspect were built around this at a later date.

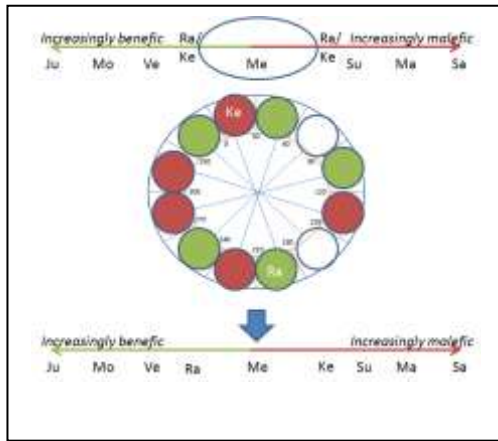
S *Who knows? Anyway, here are the 8 planets and their angular positions in degrees.*



B OK, thanks. Now I have placed them in the correct boxes along the ecliptic plane. Notice that **Ve** and **Mo** are very close together; in fact, less than a degree apart. **Me** and **Su** are pretty close together too. Generally, planets within 5-7 degrees of each other can be considered to have strongly paired up. **Ju** is just over 12 degrees away from the **Ke-Ra** axis, so we can take that to be a weak pairing. **Ma** and **Sa** are separately on their own. That gives you a general idea of the layout of the planets in this horoscope.

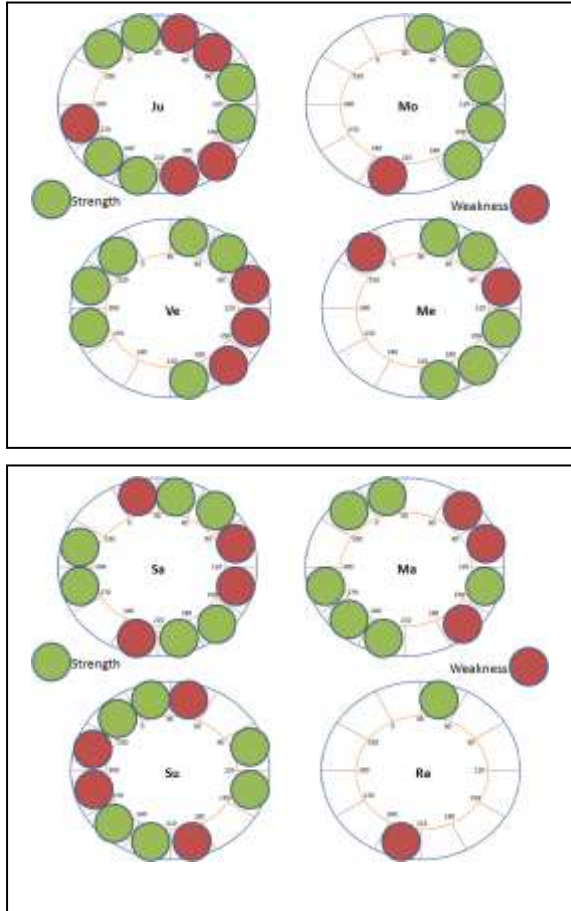
S *And that lets you draw conclusions about this person? I must say it all sounds rather weird.*

S Hold your horses and soon all will be revealed. Next I must tell you that the planets are classified as *naturally benefic* and *naturally malefic*. What this means is that by themselves some of them suggest good and some indicate bad. But their benefic or malefic nature can get modified by other factors which we shall see later. **Ju, Mo,** and **Ve** are the natural benefics whereas **Sa, Ma,** and **Su** are naturally malefic. **Me** may be taken as naturally neutral. **Ra** and **Ke** are benefic, malefic or neutral depending on their position. The boxes where **Ra/Ke** are benefic (green), malefic (red) or neutral (white) are marked alongside. In your friend's case, the location of **Ra** in green and **Ke** in red means **Ra** is benefic and **Ke** is malefic. You can call this the *base state* or the starting point – your pal starts off with 4 benefics, 4 malefics and 1 neutral planet. Then we build on this start.



S *What next?*

B Next we need to judge the strength of the planets given their arrangement in a



particular horoscope. There are 4 factors which go into judging the strength of each planet. The first of these is their position along the ecliptic. Each planet has certain positions where it is strong and others where it is weak. There may also be some positions where it is neither weak nor strong. The chart shows the strong positions for each planet in Green and weak positions in Red. Unmarked positions are neither weak nor strong. The positions for **Ke** are just the reverse of that for **Ra**, so they are not separately shown.












S *And is there some kind of logic to decide these strong and weak positions?*

B *Maybe there is but I have never come across it so far. It would certainly be an interesting topic for research. Let's figure out the positional strengths of the planets for your friend. Green is strong, red is weak, and a blank is neither.*

Planet	Positional Strength	Conjunction	Aspects	Others (Flanking, etc.)
Ju	●			
Mo				
Ve	●			
Ra				
Ma	●			
Ke				
Su	●			
Ma	●			
Sa	●			

S *Why don't you use numbers instead of these buttons, +1 for Green and -1 in place of Red? All these colored buttons makes it look like a marketing survey or an airport departure information screen.*

- B** Ha, ha! That will sure make engineers like you happy but I would like to make this accessible to a much larger audience. Besides once you tire of engineering and go into management, guess what you will be sticking up on your charts! Still, if you like, we can start using half-circles for lesser effects and full circles for more significant effects.
- S** *Well, that's a deal. But how did you figure out I am an engineer?*
- B** Obviously you are not a scientist or you would have had existential issues in even talking with me. So I figured you were the lesser of the two evils – an engineer! Plenty smart, aren't I?
- S** *Yeah, very smart for an astrologer. Shall we continue with the class, ma'am?*
- B** Right, next we look for strength or weakness due to conjunction – the close association of two or more planets. In general, hanging around with a good planet brings strength and the company of a malefic planet makes one weak. Common sense, huh? We can give full circles to conjunctions within 5-7 degrees of each other, and anything more than that up to 13-15 degrees gets a part circle. So, in case of your friend, **Mo** and **Ve** gain by each other's company, **Me** loses by being too close to **Su**, and **Ju** is partly affected by association with **Ke**, whereas **Ke** partly gains by having **Ju** nearby. So, here's the updated chart.
















<i>Planet</i>	<i>Positional Strength</i>	<i>Conjunction</i>	<i>Aspects</i>	<i>Others (Flanking, etc.)</i>
Ju		 Ke		
Mo		 Ve		
Ve		 Mo		
Ra				
Me		 Su		
Ke		 Ju		
Su				
Ma				
Sa				

- S** *All right, this is beginning to look interesting. What's next?*

B Next, we consider aspects – most planets “look at” others that lie diametrically opposite them, but some planets have additional aspects. This chart lists all of them. **Ra** and **Ke** have no aspect.

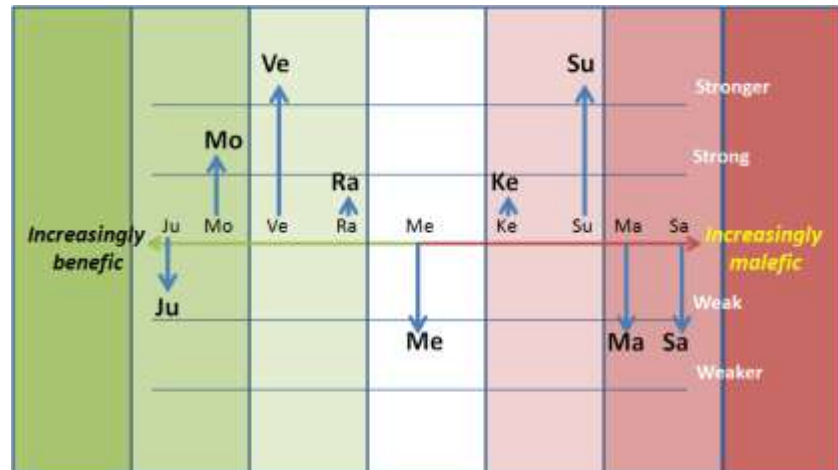
Planet	Acute aspect	180 deg aspect	Obtuse aspect
Su, Mo, Me, Ve	No	Yes	No
Sa	60°	Yes	270°
Ma	90°	Yes	210°
Ju	120°	Yes	240°

Again, we don't really know the basis for this. As in the case of conjunctions, aspects that are bang on (say, within 5-7 degrees) get a full circle, and grazing aspects (more than that and up to 13-15 degrees) get a part circle. Aspect of benefics gives strength and aspect by a malefic makes one weak. So, this is how your friend's chart looks after we have added the aspects in. Also we consider other effects, such as flanking, for instance. A planet that is flanked by two benefics on either side gains strength. Likewise, a planet flanked by malefics becomes weak, e.g., **Su, Me** gain by being flanked by **Ve-Mo** and **Ju**. There may be some other effects that we have ignored, but this is good enough for now.

<i>Planet</i>	<i>Positional Strength</i>	<i>Conjunction</i>	<i>Aspects</i>	<i>Others (Flanking, etc.)</i>
Ju		 Ke	 Sa	
Mo		 Ve		
Ve		 Mo		
Ra			 Ju	
Me		 Su		 Ve-Mo, Ju
Ke		 Ju		
Su				 Ve-Mo, Ju
Ma				
Sa				

We can now sum up the effects and move the planets up if they are strong and down if they are weak, like this. Thus, **Ve, Mo** and **Su** have gained strength, and **Ra** and **Ke** are marginally strong. On the other side, **Me, Ma** and **Sa** have become weak and **Ju** is marginally weak too. The reasons for

their strength or weakness can be found from the chart with Green and Red buttons. Also, I have arranged the planets in terms of the extent of their *natural benefic* or *natural malefic* nature – the ones further to the left in Green are more benefic and the ones further to the right in Red are more malefic.



- S** *That seems to have come out quite nicely. But what does it mean for a planet to be strong or weak?*
- B** Generally speaking, a stronger planet has a greater impact on a certain facet of one's life than a weaker planet, provided both of them influence that particular facet. Also each planet is a signifier of certain attributes, and the stronger it is, the better the prospect of that attribute being positive.
- S** *So you are saying that **Ve**, **Mo** and **Su** are the big players in my friend's horoscope. But you still cannot say anything definitive about her at this stage?*
- B** Her (grinning)? No, not yet. You see, we need to consider 5 different inputs before we can draw a conclusion about any attribute (say, intelligence). Right now, we have only one – the strength of the signifier. So it is early days yet.
- S** *Fine, thank you. I think I need a break. So shall we call it a day and schedule another meeting later?*
- B** Sure, I am glad you are still eager to know more. Bye for now!

Day 3










The same cast of two, but do we sense a thaw in the air?

S *Hi! You are looking good today.*

B Thanks. That must be afterglow of the morning yoga session. So, are you ready to analyze your girlfriend's horoscope?

S *Hey! I don't have a girlfriend, OK? And I am curious to know what you are up to – all these buttons and still no light at the end of the tunnel.*

B OK, OK. No need to get antsy. I hope you realize that astrology is serious business, not mumbo-jumbo. Today let me start by telling you that every planet represents different attributes. I have listed the key ones here with the strength or weakness of each planet in case of your friend.

Planet	Key attributes	Strength/ Weakness in this case
Ju	wisdom (philosophy), progeny, leadership (spiritual, religious)	
Mo	mind (emotion, romance), mother, the seas (as in journeys overseas)	
Ve	creativity, spouse, bodily pleasures	
Ra	affliction (accidents), alien (culture, religion), discovery/invention	
Me	intelligence, commerce (as in business/trade), speech	
Ke	the spiritual, release of the soul (<i>moksha</i>), lies/deception	
Su	soul (<i>atma</i>), father, leadership (political)	
Ma	aggression, siblings, courage	
Sa	misfortune (injuries, sorrows), evil (purpose, thinking), low status	

S *And you assert that the red button for **Me** does not imply that she is stupid?*

B Yeah, what's the hurry? The red button implies that **Me** is weak, so for an attribute like intelligence which **Me** signifies, its contribution is poor. But there are other players and we need to evaluate all of them together. Let's get on with the job. Next you need to tell me the position of the Ascendant

in her horoscope. The Ascendant is the location of the eastern horizon on the ecliptic plane at the time of birth.



Planet	Time for 1 lap around the ecliptic
As	1 day
Mo	~1 month
Su, Ve, Me	1 year
Ma	~2 years
Ju	~12 years
Ra, Ke	~18.5 years
Sa	~29.5 years

S All right, here it is.

B Good, and now I add this to the other planets on the ecliptic, like here. The box with the Ascendant (**As**) is numbered '1' and the other boxes are numbered in a clockwise order as marked from '1' to '12'. Each box is called a *house*.

S What's the deal with **As**? Why does he get to choose which house is the 1st?

B Well, the **As** is the fastest guy on the block; he does a lap of the ecliptic in a day. That is a flat 2 hours per house. As for the others, well here's the list. You can see that **Mo** is the next fastest taking about a month for 1 lap. The **Su** takes a year whereas the outer planets – **Ma**, **Ju**, **Sa** – take much longer. The lunar nodes, **Ra**, **Ke**, take around 18.5 years to make a lap of the ecliptic. Ideally speaking, there's no reason why we should not consider the other time scales as well. Which means that we should ideally analyze each horoscope from different points of view – one each with **As** in the 1st house, **Mo** in the 1st house, and so on. But that may take forever. So usually we consider only the two fastest ones – the **As**- and the **Mo**-centric points of view. And since you are in a hurry, for your friend, we shall restrict ourselves to the **As**.

S Phew! Thank you. Sometimes I wonder if we are ever going to get there at all. What happens if the **As**-centric and **Mo**-centric evaluations turn out to be grossly different? How do you conclude anything at all then?

B Good question. In my opinion, the **As**-centric version relates to the *logical self* whereas the **Mo**-centric one gives the *emotional self*. So if you knew the subject was largely a *logical* person, or largely an *emotional* one, then you could

pick only the appropriate point of view and ignore the other. Otherwise, you could do an average of the two, or just go with the **As**.

S *You don't have a medical analogy for this?*

B Ummm... not yet, but I will work on one now.

S *So for someone born a couple of hours later, the **As** would have moved into the next house, and that will then be his 1st house and the other houses follow in a clockwise manner?*

B Perfect. I see you are beginning to get the hang of this.

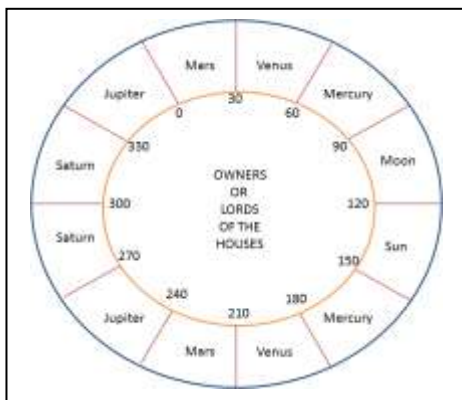
S *Hardly. But I used to think the house numbers were fixed. You know, the 1st house being the one between 0 and 30° (called Aries), and so on.*

B That may be the case in Western astrology which is unfortunately both numerically and fundamentally flawed. For instance, according to the Western system, as per her date of birth your friend's *Sun sign* should be *Aries* (0-30°) but in reality as you can see, the **Su** at 344°36' actually lies in the previous box (called *Pisces*). In fact, when many scientists find fault with astrology, they are referring to the Western system – the only one they are aware of.

S *If they knew of your system, I bet they would find fault with it too.*

B Firstly, it is not *my* system; it is something that has been handed down to us over millennia. Secondly, instead of finding fault, I would appreciate if they joined hands to figure out the basis for some of our practices whose rationale has been lost to us over the years. Anyway, shall we return to your friend for now?

S *Certainly. What else do you have for us today?*


















B One more thing you need to know. Each house has an *owner* or *lord* as indicated here. **Sa**, **Ju**, **Ma**, **Ve** and **Me**, each own two houses, and **Su** and **Mo** own one each. This is common for all, irrespective of the individual horoscope. But then depending on where the **As** is located, the planets become lords of different house numbers. Thus, in your friend's case, **Ma** is lord of 1 and 6, **Ju** owns 2 and 5, **Sa** lords over 3 and 4, **Ve** owns 7 and 12, **Me** is

lord of 8 and 11, **Mo** has 9 and **Su** owns 10. Planets become benefic by owning certain houses and malefic by becoming lords of some others. Planets may gain (become benefic) or lose (become malefic) by associating with other planets. Likewise, when they get the aspect of other planets. And there are other special occurrences, such as exchange of houses between planets (for example, 4th lord in the 9th house and vice versa) that can help or mar a planet. It would be too much to list all the rules here – better refer a book like the one you have been reading – but let us enumerate all this for the case of your friend.

S *Not more Green and Red buttons?*

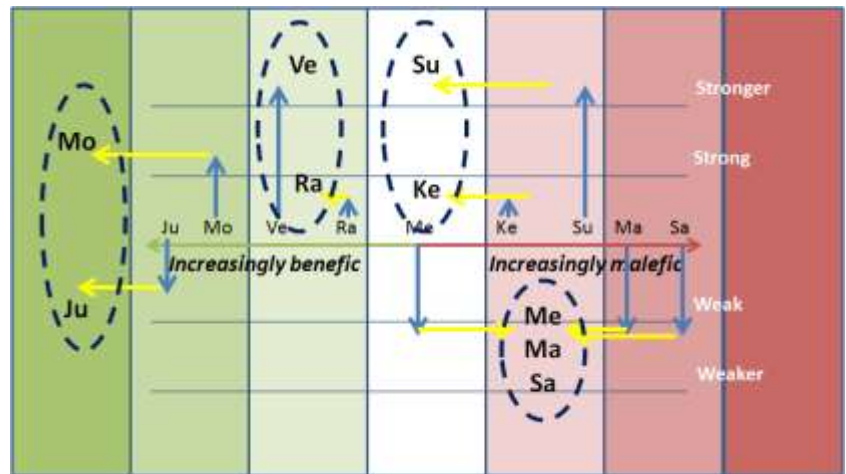
B Sure, why not? I am beginning to like them. Don't you? So here goes...

<i>Planet</i>	<i>Ownership</i>	<i>Conjunction with</i>	<i>Aspected by</i>	<i>Others (Exchange, etc.)</i>
Ju	 2 nd , 5 th		3 rd , 4 th (Sa)	
Mo	 9 th	7 th , 12 th (Ve) 		exchange with  4 th lord
Ve	 7 th , 12 th	 9 th (Mo)		
Ra	--		 2 nd , 5 th (Ju)	
Me	 8 th , 11 th 	 10 th (Su)		
Ke	--		2 nd , 5 th (Ju) 	
Su	 10 th	8 th , 11 th (Me) 		
Ma	 1 st , 6 th			
Sa	3 rd , 4 th			exchange with  9 th lord

S *The Green button again means Stronger and the Red buttons imply Weaker?*

B No, we already gauged their strength and weakness earlier, remember? The stronger ones went up on a chart and the weaker ones fell down. These Green and Red buttons further add to the benefic or malefic nature that we had marked on the chart. Take a look at it again, if you like. The benefics (in

increasing order) were **Ra, Ve, Mo, Ju** and the malefics from the least to the worst were **Ke, Su, Ma, Sa**. **Me** was neutral. Now we adjust the benefics and malefics based on these Green and Red buttons. More Green than Red means that planet becomes more benefic – that is, moves to the left on the chart. On the other hand, planets with more Red than Green move to the right on the chart – they decrease their beneficence and become more malefic. And here we are...



In the case of your friend, **Mo** is hugely benefic and reasonably strong. **Ju** is very benefic, but is marginally weak. **Ve** and **Ra** are moderately benefic, but **Ve** has good strength. **Mo** is by far the biggest positive influence; we call **Mo** in this case as a *yogakaraka* – one who signifies positive things. **Su** and **Ke** are neutral, but **Su** is quite strong. On the debit side, **Me, Ma** and **Sa** are moderately malefic, but they are all weak too. So, at first glance the positives seem to outweigh the negatives.













- S** *Very impressive, I must say. I have never seen it presented so colorfully before.*
- B** Thank you, though this is just the packaging. The next time we will unwrap this to see what is inside.
- S** *Next time?*
- B** I am afraid I need to leave now. But why don't you come over to my place for dinner next week and we can dissect your friend's horoscope. All right?

Day 4

Setting: The duo with cups of postprandial coffee in their hands.

- S** *That was a very nice meal, I must say. You do cook well.*
- B** Thanks. And you?
- S** *Tea, instant noodles, an omelet, that's it. Surely, you can tell by looking at my horoscope.*
- B** Ha, who was scared of letting me take a look at it? But let's settle with your friend first, shall we? And since I know nothing of her, I need you to help me out here.
- S** *At your service, ma'am.*
- B** Very funny. OK, we are going to start with the houses. Each house represents different traits of an individual. We shall list the things that each house stands for and simultaneously evaluate the house in your friend's case. For each house, we are going to look at 5 factors – the lord and its position, the occupants, those who aspect the house, planets that may flank the house, and the signifier for that attribute.
- S** *All this seems so complicated. Don't tell me you have to do all this work each time you read a horoscope. I thought astrologers could just take a look and know all.*
- B** Are you feeling facetious after a full meal or what? Of course, it is hard work. What we have done so far is the objective part of astrology – it's like gathering data from an experiment. Soon we shall come to the subjective part – making sense of that data and drawing reasonable conclusions. It's actually fun, so stop being a drag and come along.
- S** *Oh, well. Guess I am stuck with this for the evening anyway.*
- B** Don't pretend, I know you are dying to find out. We'll start with Houses 1, 5 and 9. These represent the soul, mind and body, respectively – the three aspects of an individual. They also represent the self, the children, and the father, respectively. You see, each house can represent different things, so we need to carefully evaluate the various factors. For example, the 5th is common for mind and children, but the signifiers for mind (**Mo**) and children (**Ju**) are different.

So, let's fill in this chart for your friend. The Green bullets are positives, the Red ones are negatives. And I have inked in a tentative conclusion for each house.

Set I	Lord	Occupant	Aspect	Flanking	Signifier
House 1 <i>Atma</i> (the soul), self, character, personality	Weak Ma in the 8 th 	None	None	None	Su for soul (<i>atma</i>), leadership (political) 
	The house is clean and Su is strong = good soul. But lord is weak and ill-placed = flaw in character.				
House 5 <i>Bhagya</i> (fortune), the mind, children	Marginally weak Ju ill-placed in the 6 th 	10 th lord Su and 8 th , 11 th lord Me , malefic 	None	Benefic Mo, Ve and benefic Ju 	Ju for progeny  Mo for mind (emotion, romance) 
	Ju is negative as lord and signifier, Su and 8 th lord Me present = difficult childbirth, loss of child. With strong Mo = good mind, but temperamental/ high strung due to Me, Su . Both + and - = mixed fortunes.				
House 9 <i>Dharma</i> (righteousness), the body, religious devotion, father, long journeys (usually associated with pilgrimages in the past)	Strong Mo well-placed in the 4 th 	Malefic 3 rd , 4 th lord Sa 	None	None	Su for father  Ju for leadership (spiritual, religious)  Mo for the seas (as in journeys overseas) 
	Strong, well-placed Mo dominates = sound body, overseas journeys. With strong Su = positive for father. But with marginally weak Ju = not particularly religious/ spiritual. Malefic Sa = something negative about either body or father or beliefs.				

S Why tentative?

B Because we also need to cross-check with the timing. For instance, one may suggest a good likelihood of childbirth, but if the periods of the helpful planets occur either too early in life or too late, then it is no good.

S OK, the hyper part matches sure enough, but she can be really sweet when she wants to.

B Wait there's more to come. Let's look at the houses 4, 7, 10 next – 4 is for what you come into this world with, 7 for what you acquire in this life, and 10 is for what you leave behind when you are gone. Here are the details and the chart filled in...

Set II	Lord	Occupant	Aspect	Flanking	Signifier
House 4 <i>Prosperity, state of mind (peace & happiness), ancestral property, mother, education</i>	Weak Sa well-placed in the 9 th	Hugely benefic 9 th lord Mo with benefic 7 th , 12 th lord Ve	None	None	Mo for mother Ju for education
	Strong, highly benefic Mo totally dominates, in a <i>rajayoga</i> with Ve = positive for childhood, mother. With marginally weak Ju = decent education, but not great.				
House 7 <i>Vyavahara (acquisitions, material gains), health, bodily pleasures, spouse, marital life, earnings</i>	Very strong lord Ve well-placed in the 4 th with Mo	None	None	Neutral Ke and malefic Ma	Ve for spouse, bodily pleasures
	Strong, benefic combination of Ve, Mo = romantic, enjoys physical pleasures and comforts of life, marries for love, successful marriage. But malefic Ma = affects married life.				
House 10 <i>Karma (deeds), body of work, profession, name & honors</i>	Strong Su well-placed in the 5 th with weak 8 th and 11 th lord Me	None	Benefics Mo, Ve, Ju	None	Ju for wisdom (philosophy) Me for commerce (as in business/trade) Ra for discovery/invention
	Strong Su and aspect of 3 benefics = good deeds, professionally successful. But weak Ju, Me = not intellectual or commercial profession.				

S OK, some of that rings true, but it all seems so general. Can't you pin it down more specifically? And what is a rajayoga?

B Not bad though for someone I have never met, isn't it? Actually, the purpose of this exercise is to help the person build on their strengths and reduce losses due to their weaknesses. For instance, the same **Ma** that hints at a minor defect in her personality in house 1 also affects her married life in house 7. If she can identify this, she can work on it to improve herself and her life. But I will be able to tell you something more definite when we start looking at the various periods. Just hang on. Next, on to houses 2, 8 and 11...

Set III	Lord	Occupant	Aspect	Flanking	Signifier
House 2 <i>Wealth (unearned), family, creative abilities</i>	Marginally weak Ju ill-placed in the 6 th ●	None	Very benefic Ju ● Malefic Ma ●	None	Ve for creativity ● Ju ●
	Dominated by middling Ju = average family background. Malefic Ma = affects family life. Strong Ve = hard to determine area of creativity but not science or philosophy.				
House 8 <i>Longevity, death, legacies, disgrace</i>	Weak Me ill-placed in the 5 th with Su ●	Malefic Ma ●	None	None	Sa for low status ●
	All indications negative = doubtful longevity, possible nervous debility/ heartbreak.				
House 11 <i>Non-material gains, friends, elder siblings, accomplishments</i>	Weak Me well-placed in the 5 th with Su ●	None	Su, Me, Ma, Sa all malefic ● ●	None	Ma for siblings ● Ju ●
	Me not strong enough to overturn other malefics = largely negative, doesn't gain much from friends, elder siblings.				




Ah, the *rajayoga* – it is a powerful, beneficial combination of planets that does much good. For instance, the combination of 9th lord **Mo** and 7th lord **Ve** is a *rajayoga*, it greatly enhances the 4th house which they occupy and the 10th which they aspect. Likewise, the exchange of houses

between the 9th lord **Mo** and 4th lord **Sa** is also a powerful *yoga*.

S *Aw! This lot did not turn out as good as some of the previous houses.*

B Yes, that's how it's going to be for most of us; some good, some bad. We try to maximize gains from our strengths and minimize losses due to our weaknesses. The key houses are the 1st, 4th, 5th, 7th, 9th, 10th which we examined earlier. Nearly all of them are pretty good in her case, except for the 5th and the presence of the 1st lord **Ma** in the 8th house. Unfortunately, **Ju** is not pulling weight and **Me** is weak – those are the big negatives. Let's round this up with the last set of three houses.

Set IV	Lord	Occupant	Aspect	Flanking	Signifier
House 3 <i>Intelligence, younger siblings, courage, loss of inherited wealth</i>	Weak Sa well placed in the 9 th	None	Malefics Ma, Sa	None	Me for intelligence, speech
					Ma for aggression, younger siblings, courage
All the players are weak = loses due to lack of diplomacy and verbal aggression.					
House 6 <i>Debts, disease, enemies, generally material losses</i>	Weak Ma well-placed in the 8 th	Very benefic Ju and neutral Ke	Malefic Sa	None	Sa for misfortune (injuries, sorrows)
					Ra for affliction (accidents)
Benefic Ju = generally assures good health, finances and no enemies; losses, if any, are self-inflicted.					
House 12 <i>Moksha (liberation of the soul), spirituality (as in</i>	Very strong Ve well-placed with	Mildly benefic Ra	Benefic Ju	None	Sa for evil (purpose, thinking)
					Ke for the spiritual,

<i>renunciation) , residence abroad (as in banishment), misery, generally non-material losses</i>	Mo in the 4 th 				release of the soul (<i>moksha</i>)  Ra for alien (culture, religion) 
	Largely positive = Free from evil, may embrace foreign customs/ religion. Good combination of 9 th and 12 th lords suggests travel abroad for work/ leisure, even marriage.				

- S** *You know, that didn't turn out very badly at all. In fact, I am quite impressed. I feel I can piece together all this and fashion something pretty close to the original character.*
- B** Thank you, that's very kind of you. And now it's getting pretty late, so it's time for you to be heading home.
- S** *Hey! Wait a minute. I was just warming up...*
- B** Right. That's exactly what I am worried about...
- S** *So, what happened to the predictions?*
- B** Call me another day. In the meanwhile, you can get this information for me.

Day 5

The pair comfortably seated in a cozy nook of his club.

S *I hope the meal was satisfactory.*

B Satisfactory? It was awesome. I can't believe you dine like this every day. How can you afford an expensive club like this?

S *Not every day, only on special occasions. And you are right, I couldn't afford it but it comes with the job. Part of the perks.*

B Gosh! What kind of a job do you actually do?

S *I design thingies in which you burn kerosene, you know.*

B What? Like those cooking stoves we used to have ages ago? Come on, you are pulling my leg.

S *Well, not exactly those kinds of stoves, perhaps a little larger. And you wouldn't exactly use these for cooking, but I guess the principle's the same. Anyway, here's the information you asked for.*

B Thanks, I need this to make "predictions."

Vimshottari Dasha								
Dasha	EndDate	Age						
Ju/Sa	28-Oct-1977	1.62	Me/Me	28-Jul-2010	34.36	Ve/Su	28-Jun-2036	60.29
Ju/Me	28-Jan-1980	3.89	Me/Ke	28-Jul-2011	35.36	Ve/Mo	28-Feb-2038	61.96
Ju/Ke	28-Dec-1980	4.82	Me/Ve	28-May-2014	38.19	Ve/Ma	28-Apr-2039	63.12
Ju/Ve	28-Aug-1983	7.49	Me/Su	28-Mar-2015	39.04	Ve/Ra	28-Apr-2042	66.12
Ju/Su	28-Jun-1984	8.29	Me/Mo	28-Aug-2016	40.46	Ve/Ju	28-Dec-2044	68.79
Ju/Mo	28-Oct-1985	9.62	Me/Ma	28-Aug-2017	41.45	Ve/Sa	28-Feb-2048	71.96
Ju/Ma	28-Sep-1986	10.56	Me/Ra	28-Feb-2020	44	Ve/Me	28-Dec-2050	74.79
Ju/Ra	28-Feb-1989	12.96	Me/Ju	28-Jun-2022	46.26	Ve/Ke	28-Feb-2052	75.96
Sa/Sa	28-Feb-1992	15.96	Me/Sa	28-Feb-2025	48.96	Su/Su	28-Jun-2052	76.26
Sa/Me	28-Oct-1994	18.66	Ke/Ke	28-Jul-2025	49.36	Su/Mo	28-Dec-2052	76.76
Sa/Ke	28-Dec-1995	19.76	Ke/Ve	28-Sep-2026	50.53	Su/Ma	28-Apr-2053	77.11
Sa/Ve	28-Feb-1999	22.93	Ke/Su	28-Jan-2027	50.88	Su/Ra	28-Mar-2054	78.01
Sa/Su	28-Jan-2000	23.88	Ke/Mo	28-Aug-2027	51.46	Su/Ju	28-Dec-2054	78.81
Sa/Mo	28-Aug-2001	25.46	Ke/Ma	28-Jan-2028	51.87	Su/Sa	28-Dec-2055	79.76
Sa/Ma	28-Sep-2002	26.57	Ke/Ra	28-Feb-2029	52.92	Su/Me	28-Oct-2056	80.61
Sa/Ra	28-Aug-2005	29.42	Ke/Ju	28-Jan-2030	53.86	Su/Ke	28-Feb-2057	80.96
Sa/Ju	28-Feb-2008	31.96	Ke/Sa	28-Feb-2031	54.96	Su/Ve	28-Feb-2058	81.96
			Ke/Me	28-Feb-2032	55.96	Mo/Mo	28-Dec-2058	82.79
			Ve/Ve	28-Jun-2035	59.29			

S *What is this? It looks like a railway timetable. I assumed you would use the present position of the planets to make predictions.*

B Those are the transits, they are of minor significance. Imagine driving from Place A to Place B on the freeway and you change lanes a few times along the way. The lane changes are like the transits – they happen, but they mean nothing; it's the transport from A to B that matters.

S Aren't all the astrological columns in the newspapers based on transits?

B Yes, they are, and did you notice they are placed with the comics?

S And how about those books that claim to predict your year ahead? Also transits?

B I would suppose so and they should be placed in the fiction section at the book stores.

S And you have a prediction method that works?

B It's not mine; it's something unique to the Indian system of astrology and is called the *dasa* or period. Every planet is given a certain number of years and these periods run cyclically in the sequence as shown here. It totals up to 120 years. The starting point on this cycle for a horoscope is determined by the position of the **Mo** on the ecliptic. In the case of your friend, the "railway timetable" shows that she was born about 3 years into the *dasa* of **Ju**, so she got nearly 13 years of the 16 years allotted to **Ju**. This was followed by 19 years of **Sa**, and now is the 17-year period of **Me**.

Planet	<i>Dasa</i> (Period)
Su	6 years
Mo	10 years
Ma	7 years
Ra	18 years
Ju	16 years
Sa	19 years
Me	17 years
Ke	7 years
Ve	20 years

S This seems so arbitrary.

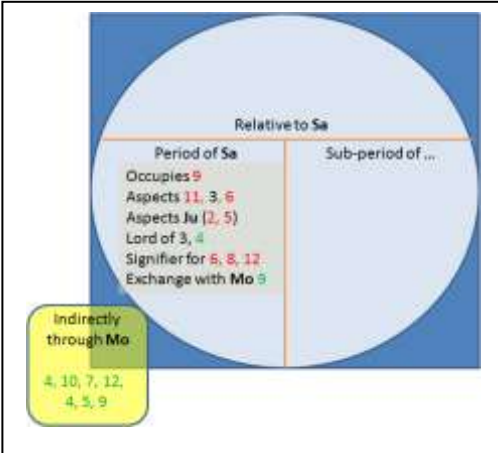
B True, we do not know how this arrangement came about. Interestingly the 18-year period given to **Ra** matches closely with the time taken by it to make a lap of the ecliptic (18.5 years as we have seen before). But there is no similar correlation for the other planets.

S Fine. Each entry in the "railway timetable" has two planets, like **Ju/Sa**. What does that mean?

B Within the *dasa* of each planet, the periods of all the planets cycle – these are called the *sub-periods*. So, for instance, the **Sa** period starts with the *sub-period* of **Sa** (written as **Sa/Sa**) followed by that of **Me** (that is, **Sa/Me**), and so on. These sub-periods are calculated on a *pro rata* basis – that is, during the **Sa** period, the sub-period of each planet is equal

to 19/120 times its planetary period. There's some math for you. Happy?

S Now you are going to say that **Sa** for my friend is malefic and weak, so the 19 years of **Sa** period are going to be bad for her. Right?



B Wrong! It's a little more complicated than that. See, I have put down in this diagram the various roles **Sa** plays in her horoscope. The helpful ones are in Green and the harmful ones are in Red. The neutral or minor ones are in Black. **Sa** mainly helps in 4, 9 – so, that's good for mother, education, domestic life, father, body, religious devotion. But **Sa** also has a negative impact on 9, plus is not being helpful for 6 – so a slight issue with health/body perhaps. And, by its aspect on **Ju**, it affects 2 and 5. Importantly the exchange between **Sa** and **Mo** brings the latter into the picture indirectly – that is shown in a separate, linked box. **Mo** further helps 4 and certain aspects of 9 (overseas travel), overpowers **Sa** on 12, and aids in 5 (mind) and 10. Summing up all this, one can make some inference about influences on her life in this period.

S Can you, for instance, predict anything about her marriage in this period?

B In **Sa** period? Let's try... but remember, we cannot predict what she would do, we can only deduce the possibilities and their times. First we look back at our analysis of the houses and write down the planets that have a benefic influence on the 7th house and those that have a malefic effect. The biggest plus is obviously **Ve**, lord and signifier, and with it is *yogakaraka* **Mo** who is very benefic. On the minus side are **Ma** and **Ke**. As for **Sa** himself, we have seen that he does not have a direct impact on the 7th house. He is linked to **Mo** and that has an

Sa/Sa	28-Feb-1992	15.96
Sa/Me	28-Oct-1994	18.66
Sa/Ke	28-Dec-1995	19.76
Sa/Ve	28-Feb-1999	22.93
Sa/Su	28-Jan-2000	23.88
Sa/Mo	28-Aug-2001	25.46
Sa/Ma	28-Sep-2002	26.57
Sa/Ra	28-Aug-2005	29.42
Sa/Ju	28-Feb-2008	31.96

association with **Ve**, but that may be a bit tenuous. With that, let us examine the various sub-periods in **Sa dasa** as shown here. The periods boxed in Red are ruled out as being too early or undesirable. The ones circled in Green are preferable, either would be a romantic alliance. But the good work can be undone by discord in **Sa/Ma** period. Otherwise, the back-up can be the sub-period of **Ra** which takes its benefic nature from being in the house of **Ve**, but then the advantage of the **Ve-Mo** combination is lost. **Ra** also suggests an unconventional marriage in terms of nationality or religion or culture, and possibly one based less on romance and more on other factors.

S *That is astonishingly close, and the way you put it, it all sounds so obvious. Is this all there is to it, or are you holding something back from me?*

B Of course, I haven't revealed everything to you – that wouldn't be good for my business, would it? But barring some finer corrections and a few complications, this is the gist. Now what are *you* holding back from me?

S *Nothing much. We had a good thing going but it didn't work out.*

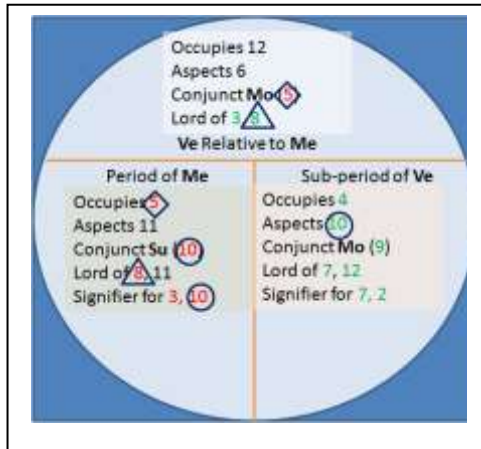
B I am sorry to hear that, but don't tell me you have been mooning over her ever since.

S *No, I plunged myself in work and have done very well for myself, as you can see. Besides, this is not about any individual, this is about the principles. I am still curious to see how you can make a prediction about the future.*

B Right. How about considering the **Me/Ve** period? Fine, here we go. I filled in this chart for you. On one side are all the influences of **Me**, on the other are the effects of **Ve**. To this, we also need to add the roles played by **Ve** when we consider a **Me**-centric point of view. Of course, **Ve** continues to be very strong as we determined right at the beginning for this horoscope. But with respect to **Me** being in house number 1, **Ve** owns houses 3 and 8 which are negative, so he

at best becomes neutral. Further, **Ve** is placed in the 12th house from **Me** in the company of 5th lord **Mo** – that does not help **Ve**, rather it negatively affects **Mo**. This information is added at the top of the chart.

S *And now can you please make sense of this chart for me?*



B Isn't it obvious? Take a look at the circled numbers. For example, **Me** affects the 10th lord **Su**, hence is negative for profession – the damage should have happened early in **Me dasa**. But **Ve** (with **Mo**) has a beneficial aspect on the 10th, so we can expect a professional recovery which may become fully apparent in the succeeding **Su** sub-period. Next, **Me** as 8th lord is not helpful to the 8th house, so **Me dasa** can bring in news of death. But **Ve** has a beneficial influence on the 8th, so at least the **Ve** sub-period may be without losses on that front. Then, **Me** is a bad influence on the 5th, so this period is not positive for childbirth. Here **Ve** as 8th lord from **Me**, in the 12th house, afflicts 5th lord **Mo** – again a negative. So I would not recommend trying to conceive a child during this period. And so on... Remember, none of this *will* happen – they are likely. It is up to the individual to make it happen or not.

S *How does it help someone to know all this? To borrow your medical analogy, it's like going to a doctor who tells you about your disease but offers you no cure.*

B Yes, that is a valid observation. But in this case the "cure" lies with oneself. Forewarned, one can plan one's life accordingly. For instance, if there is a danger to profession, one can consciously try to steer clear of any unpleasant situation at work. Or if the period is known to be not conducive for childbirth, one can avoid the pain, or decide to adopt a child.

S *Don't you have simpler solutions – a religious offering, or a pilgrimage, or a gemstone?*

B There's no dearth of tricksters and charlatans who offer you these "services." I wouldn't want to add to their ilk. There is

no connection whatsoever between astrology and religion. Yet I guess people who face trouble in their lives are willing to give anything a shot, no matter how irrational it may seem.

S *Don't you think these quacks give astrology a bad name?*

B Sure, they do. Sadly the alternatives are few, so these cheats have a field day. A seller's market, I think you would call it. Until we have a system where a person can walk into a hospital or a clinic and meet a *rational astrologer*, the same as meeting a dentist or a psychiatrist, we will have this huge unregulated grey market.

S *And you are doing your bit to rectify the situation?*

B Not really. I do this because I find it enjoyable and satisfying. I don't offer any magic potions. I dig for the truth – somewhat like a detective.

S *And what kind of truths do you uncover, Hercule Poirot?*

B I love those stories, don't you? Well, here's a recent example – nothing as exciting, but real life. One of my friends, a counselor at the university, was dealing with a student who had complained of sexual harassment, but she wasn't entirely convinced. A look at her horoscope with a close conjunction of **Mo** and **Ra** suggested psychological issues. That prompted my friend to refer her to a shrink who diagnosed her with low self-esteem problems. Apparently, she told lies to gain sympathy, and they were able to discover previous incidents of a similar nature involving her. Though I didn't make any money on this, I felt good that I could save an innocent person whose career might have been finished unfairly.

S *But you can't live on feel-good, can you?*

B Oh, don't worry. I make enough to sustain myself. You have no idea of the number of people facing myriad problems, none of which can even be approached by modern science.

S *I guess astrologers make their killing in the matrimonial market.*

B You mean matching horoscopes of the bride and the groom? I don't do that; don't believe in it. Why that astonished look? Those rules were made eons ago when a patriarchal society preferred a bride who would serve her

husband until his death, deliver many sons, live peacefully in an extended family, and so on. Yeah, yeah... I know things are not far better in many parts of the world even today. But since I won't marry by those rules, I shouldn't advise anyone else to do so either.

S *You mean that astrology has no role to play in the modern marriage?*

B No, I didn't say that. To me, it would primarily depend on my comfort level with the other person. But, you know, people do put on their best behavior at those times. So, as a secondary check, I would certainly scan his horoscope to look for danger signs.

S *Such as?*

B An affliction of **Mo** by **Ra** (mental issues), a bad combination of **Ve** and **Ma** (sexual extravagance), or a weak **Ju** (no high thinking)...

S *Gosh! And how many people have failed Level 2, if I may ask?*

B Actually, not many have gotten that far, but I have a good one in hand now. **Ju, Mo** in conjunction, which is a powerful *yoga*; close conjunction of **Ve-Me**, which suggests a creative, scientific mind; and the two pairs in mutual aspect without any malefic influence – makes them all strong and benefic.

S *Oh! I am happy for you. I was going to ask if you would care to be the navigator of my car...*

B Sure, that's no problem.

S *Uh, not professionally... I mean, personally.*

B Is that a proposal?

S *Well, it would have been, except... you seem to have already found your soul-mate.*

B Well, then I accept!

S *What?*

B That horoscope – it's yours!

THE END