Kāla and Mahakāla: Time and the timeless in the Vedic literature

Ramesh N Rao, Alex Hankey, HR Nagendra, R Nagarathna
Department of Yoga and Physical Science, Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana (S-Vyasa), Bangalore, Karnataka, India

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Correspondence Address: Ramesh N Rao
Eknath Bhavan, 19 Gavipuram Circle, K.G. Nagar, Bangalore - 560 019, Karnataka

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Abstract

Background: Several recent experimental studies have strongly suggested that the ancient concept of Muhurta, or influence of starting time on outcome of a process or project, can be tested in systems in microbiology. This implies that factors connected to Jyotish astrology can act on biological systems, leading to the study of time as a heterogeneous variable in biological and social sciences. Aims: The purpose is to provide perspectives on the new results by exploring ancient conceptions of time, as recorded in various sections of the Vedic literature, with reference to conceptions of time within Vedic astrology. Materials and Methods: Various sections of the Vedic literature and associated philosophies were examined; statements concerning the nature of time were abstracted and integrated. Results: Various different conceptions of time are described, in order to show how the profound relationship between the timeless and time, first experienced in meditation, was first conceptualized and understood. The distinction between the Real and unreal, the indivisible, timeless reality underlying time, and measurable time, corresponding to mahakāla and kāla (the timeless and time), is used to define ritual time (Karma kāla), which was the original purpose of Jyotish astrology-to help guarantee the success of ritual actions. Discussion and Conclusions: Only by expanding awareness beyond time, kāla, to become established in the timeless, mahakāla, can an individual be liberated and go beyond the 'bite of time'.

Keywords: Jyotish, ritual time, shastra, time

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Time, space and causation are like a glass through which the Absolute may be conceived. There, neither time, space nor causation exist.
Introduction: Time

Time concerns us all; humans, animals, matter, and the whole universe; all are in its grip. Everything suffers from 'the bite of time'. Time is all pervading. We all live under its power: Human self-consciousness is inseparable from time. Man lives in time, he is aware of time, he reckons with time. Time is the matrix of all distinctions. Every human activity or experience, whether physical or psychological, social or environmental, is inexorably linked with the passage of time.

Experience of the passage of time lies deep within. In the depth of a full mind, distinction can be made between the Real and unreal. There, time, kāla, is experienced as neither merely objective nor purely subjective. The concept of 'real time' is not possible within a dualistic vision. Kāla is not manifested in terms of space, distance, course, orbit, way, or journey (theĀdhamvā’s); but through kiṣya-action, work, and doing; involving specific passage of time and time duration. This aspect of time is colored by influences described by Jyotish astrology as connected to the chemistry of nature.

The ancient Sanskrit language has several words denoting different aspects of the time concept, with meanings:[1]

1. Kāla: To calculate, enumerate, and also death
2. Dista: Time assignment and appointed moments
3. Ancha: Incomparable, unattainable, and unobstructed
4. Samaya: Right time(s) for doing anything involving the study of energy and force in space.

The ancients regarded the entire universe as a living organism, continuously changing in its manifestation. From dawn to dusk and from dusk to dawn, everything changes. Change is the basic law in creation. Motion was seen as a sequence of events to which times can be assigned, that is, time was regarded as the outcome of motion, rather than motion as the outcome of time. The present review aims to elucidate these ancient concepts of time and gain a comprehensive understanding of them.

The Vedic Concept of Time

In Sanskrit, the kāla concept encompasses movements of everything in existence: planets and cycles of human life. In this Vedic conception, time has two aspects: the timelessness of eternity, mahakāla, within which all events take place in relative time, kāla.[1] The entire structure of Vedic culture is aimed at the return to mahakāla's timeless eternity from within the bonds of kāla time-moksha.[2]

The eternal is regarded as the unmanifest source of all the laws of nature governing every aspect of existence within time, a state of Absolute Pure Being, itself Self-Referral and self-sufficient. The unmanifest source is thus pure consciousness, devoid of any external object, conscious of Self alone. These dynamics of self-referral consciousness embody the dynamics of all the laws of Nature in their unmanifest state. [3]

Mahakāla is regarded as Bhagawan-self-originated, nothing generates it. It is without origin. In contrast, kāla is always moving on (ghati sheel), it can never be stopped. The name kāla signifies both time and death. Kāla is responsible for the life and death of each human being. Kāla is the destroyer of all existence, carrying all organisms towards physical destruction. Qualities attached to time are responsible for all happiness and sorrow. These concerns are the domain of Jyotish astrology. [4]

Time is personified as the God of death (Yama). Because death is the limiting factor in human life, kāla determines how long a person lives upon earth; influenced by the time of birth. So time and death are associated, as the individual’s time on earth begins with birth and ends with death. [5]

For the soul (atman), however, there is no death, no time, [6] because it is without beginning and without end. The Vedic concept of time is based on soul experience making the moksha transition from kāla to mahakāla through meditation and ritual. [7][8]

Ritual Time

All ritual is aimed at the eternal, mahakāla, creating an essential connection between the two kālas. Ritual time (karma kāla) mediates between kāla and mahakāla. It is impermanent because it takes place within kāla, temporal time. Ritual itself is an aspect of the law that transcends all laws, causes the birth, and death of all corporeal beings, things, and events; and upholds the cosmos by its own power. [5] Whatever is created in time (kāla) naturally dissolves into timelessness, mahakāla. To a man in the tradition, life is lived in a constant state of ritual; there is no time other than ritual time. [6] Time, space, and man as a time-space machine are ritually constructed, and carry the seeds of cosmic harmony. The ultimate goal of all ritual is to transcend relative time, antya kāla, to mahakāla, ritual time, which is characterized by Akarma (action without generating karma), Akrāma (no perceived order), and Akāla (beyond time). [10]
Rashis: Signs of the zodiac

In this view, the solar system is a 'time-space machine', source, and mediator of cosmic currents flowing to beings on earth, and responsible for all qualities of time-space. The sun and moon represent universal clocks, ways to measure the duration of ritual time. Moon cycles determine its muhuruthas. Each year contains 12 months, both solar and lunar months, organized according to the 12 rashis, that is, zodiac signs [Figure 1] [11].

Figure 1: The signs of the zodiac in Jyotish astrology. The ecliptic divided into 12 divisions, 'Rashis', or 'Signs of the Zodiac'
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The ecliptic is divided into 12 equal divisions called Rashis or 'signs of the zodiac'. The 12 signs are also known as the 'limbs of the year'. In Jyotish, they are held to give time a form, each 'limb' endowing time with a different quality. [4] They thus constitute a heavenly body, the body of the cosmic time person, or Kāla Purusha [Figure 2] a and b.

Figure 2: 
Click here to view

Nakshatras

In addition to the 12 signs, Jyotish further divides the ecliptic into 27 'Nakshatras'[Table 1], each sign containing parts or the whole of three Nakshatras. [12] The 27 Nakshatras each span an angle of 13°20', making up in a full circle or 'Nakshatra wheel' (13°20' x 27 = 360°) [see Figure 3]. Each Nakshatra is thus a region of space associated with a group of stars, the name usually referring to the brightest star in the group, and to the nondecaying current from that domain of time-space.

Figure 3: The 27 Nakshatras (Lunar star signs) in Jyotish astrology
Click here to view

Table 1: The 27 Nashatras and their Lords
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The Nakshatras are associated with the nine grahas [13] in a set sequence:

Ketu-Venus-Sun-Moon-Rahu-Jupiter-Saturn-Mercury

So each planet rules over three Nakshatras. [14][Table 1] names the 27 Nakshatras and their controlling planets in three cycles of nine, the order is the same as that of the 'dasha' time periods by which the planets govern a person's life.

The word Nakshatra means 'one that never decays'. Nakshatras exert a protective watch over the soul continuing over many lifetimes. In its monthly cycle, the Moon spends roughly 1 day in each Nakshatra. The tradition states that the Nakshatras are the daughters of Daksha and Kashyapa Brahma, and wives of Chandra. Rotating round the sky each lunar month, the moon spends one night with each in succession. This expresses the idea that each Nakshatra possesses a different quality of energy field, which is transmitted to earth through the moon each Nakshatra day. Each Nakshatra is connected to ancient myths and gods. Each has its own prakriti or individual nature, represented by a symbol, an animal sign, character traits, emotions, and spiritual patterns; as well as a color, vowel sound, and names. [12] Each is made of many strands that include: Gunas, Doshas, and aims in life.

Gunas

All elements of Jyotish are associated with psychological qualities expressed in terms of Gunas; the word 'Guna' also means 'strand', each Guna plays an important part in the life of the individual from the perspectives of Yoga, Ayurveda, and Jyotish. [15] They are:

Sattva

Sattva is the subtle impulse ('va') of 'sat', the eternal, imperishable. Sattva is the subtle impulse of mahakāla within kāla; by becoming sattvic, man becomes empowered to return to the eternal. It is the food material for dwelling in 'the real'. Having the attribute of purity; 'Sat' also means 'being, existing, pure, true, and real'; 'sattva' is where purity dwells. A sattvic person values purity of being, thought, and action. An example of pure sattva is pure water. Vegetarianism is sattvic, because it rejects killing to fulfill the need to eat. [15] The power of Sattva works on an abstract level.

Rajas

Rajas is the quality of taking action; the searching quality possessed by all human beings. It can be equated with 'pollen of flowers', moral, emotional, or mental darkness. 'Pollon of flowers' is the potential to create new flowers, just as humans activate new life, experiencing life and death. 'Moral, emotional, or mental darkness' is the inability of people to find answers within themselves, and consequently to reject killing to fulfill the need to eat.
Tamas

Tamas, the attribute of darkness, can also be translated as 'ignorance', making it plain that the darkness is mental. Mentally, tamasic people emphasize sensuality. They lack spiritual insight and knowledge, enjoying hedonist lifestyles, and focusing on sensual gratification. Vedic culture suggests that tamasic people escape from their ignorance through work and service. Tamas works on the practical level.

Grahas: The planets

The grahas also have distinctive qualities, some being benefic and some malefic. They have distinctive spheres (space) of influence. In constructing a horoscope to guide human activity, their disposition and relative values are calculated.

The panchangas

Ritual time and Jyotish astrology time go hand in hand. Neglecting the former, Jyotish time is purely kāla, relative time; but in the context of ritual, it is transformed by ritual time into mahakāla. Absolute Time-beyond time. There are five kinds of Jyotish time division: Panchangas, which serve a two-fold purpose in ritual time, they schedule religious ceremonies and they record cosmic events taking into account lunar, solar, and stellar situations. These 'five limbs' are: Tithi (day in lunar cycle), Vara (solar day), Nakshatra (lunar position), Yoga (quality of time by sun-mon relationship), and Karana (half-lunar day). The Panchangas ascribe strengths and qualities to divisions of time.

Ritual time-space is specially created for the desired consciousness. Like time, space is of varying quality, diverse, and discontinuous. Not all places are suitable for sacred activities, some are more effective than others. A location's effectiveness depends on vāstu, associations with Gods, sages, and pitris (ancestral spirits). It can be improved by the power of mantras. Within sacred space, purity space (supreme sattva) and protection space (kavach) are important components.

Ritual time is measured by uttering an appropriate number of mantras, counting beads, reading scripture, and using ritual instruments. By increasing the number of performers, ritual time can be accelerated with each successive performance. When a ritual is performed, its ritual time and ritual space are inextricably bound together. The impact of, or merit accrued from a ritual action can be increased many times by performing it at an auspicious time, for example, bathing in a river. Similarly, directions faced by performers of rituals at various times are prescribed. Each ritual has component actions (karma) which must be performed in a prescribed order (krama), at appropriate times (ritual kāla). These make up the Mahakarma great act within the mahakāla of the ritual. They can best be understood by analogy with the three concepts of body-mind-spirit, which together participate as a single entity. Ultimately, as ritual is rooted in the transcendent, the ultimate goal of ritual is to transcend the temporal into mahakāla, the eternal.

Time in Jyotish Astrology

Jyotish regards the whole existence as a singular unit spread over the canvas of space and time; past, present, and future. All appearance is manifested from the invisible 'seed force level' to the gross level of the matter world with its own cosmic order. Every individual moves under the influence of 'guiding laws of nature'. These are transmitted in consonance with the overall structure of natural law, from heavenly mansions revolving round the individual and celestial bodies in orbits round the sun (or earth), and felt as tendencies down below by human beings in their abode on earth.

Astrology is thus a time-space science offering systematic explanations for differences in personality, talents, peculiarities, temperament, likes and dislikes, opportunities, and experiences; in short, how the worlds of man and cosmos are coordinated; how the workings of the solar world, situated millions of miles above us, direct variations in body and mind Prakriti, and are thus the key to understanding our life on earth; and how, when man acknowledges the cosmic source of his feelings and thoughts, the two worlds are brought into harmony and collaboration, so that man can return to his source and kāla be transmuted into mahakāla.

The cosmic world is the ultimate source of all the various factors influencing our lives. From the sky and space, we receive varying qualities of light, air, heat, and rain. These factors influence the production of foodstuffs like fruits, vegetables, and herbs that are essential to human life. Plants receive the seed energy from space and transmit it to the bodies of those that consume them, just as mantras transmit the seed energy of spirit into the mind. Both augment the prana, one from without, the other from within.

In Jyotish, literally, the 'Lord' or 'science' of light, the medium of light is the measuring tool of time and the movements of all things. Planetary movements are closely correlated with changes in bodily organs and functions. Phases of sun and moon, and corresponding flows of their energies, all relate to health. The sun relates to awareness while the moon relates to the mind, creating changes in emotion and mental faculties. The moon in turn conveys qualities analogous to colors from its location to all beings on earth. Each planet is similarly connected to physiology in terms of colors.

Cycles of Cosmic Time

Cosmic time is perceived as cyclical, a never ending cyclical process, which is both repetitive and exhaustive. Each time cycle has three components: Srishti - creation, Stithi - continuation, and Layā - dissolution. Each cycle begins with creation, continues for a certain duration, and then dissolves into nothingness; repeating after a brief respite. The same divisions are found in a day: Each day consists of dawn, daytime, and dusk; finally dissolving into the darkness of night; similarly for individual life, consisting of childhood-adulthood-old age.

The Vedic calculation of time comes from the sage Ganita who is mentioned in the Manusmriti and Mahabharat. He calculated the duration of each cycle in years. He divided cosmic time into kalpas which is a day and night in the time and space of Brahma, the creator. Each kalpa is said to equal to 8.64 billion years (Vishnu purana). One kalpa consists of two arthakaupalgs (4.32 billion years of each), which are a day and night of Brahma. Each arthakaupalp is divided into 1,000 mahayuga's. Each mahayuga is divided into four yuga's namely Kritiyuga, Dvapar yuga, Treta yuga, and Kali yuga.
The sun, moon, and stars do not shine in presence of Brahman. Implication: They have no light of their own, but derive their light from the individual, but Brahman is not specific to any time or place, he is beyond time and space; like Omkara.

Time is the creator of everything.

Time is supreme and Time Science is a science of the highest importance.

Trikalaateetam refers to Absolute time. When we relate to particular times and places, we are speaking of the past, present, and future are relative terms. 

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The Upanishads propose the concept of maya. Only the Absolute is real. With reference to that, divisible time, in which change occurs, is ' unreal'. The whole concept of change is due to a misconception, an illusion, because the Real, the Absolute, is not in time. Rather the Seer is being absorbed into the Whole-mahakāla.

No substance exists other than the Lord, neither the elements, nor karma, nor time, nor prakriti, nor jiva*. All are His Maya, assuming form under triguna. For the purpose of creation, preservation, and destruction through the agency of the five senses, and their corresponding objects Lord Vasudeva presides over the senses. The gunas bind individual souls with consciousness in the body-mind, all in one. Time knowledge is a sovereign science, containing sovereign secrets; it is supreme, holy, most excellent, directly enjoyable, imperishable, an unmanifest divinity, and ananta (endless).

The Vedic literature regards quantified time as an aspect of creation. We experience it only as long as we are bound to the things of this world through our senses. Time is a mental construct, created in every instant by our senses, and subjective perception. It is a part of the illusion which we take as real. In God's sphere, consciousness, there are no divisions of time. There is only the present moment, one continuous, indivisible, and indistinguishable state of existence—the 'eternal present'.

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Yoga vasishtha

Kaka Bhushunda who remained immortal, even though time encompasses birth and death was questioned by Sri Rama. In answer to the question, Bhushunda narrates the secret of his long life. “Death does not come nor does the thread of time work in one

1. whose heart does not carry any desire or anger;
2. whose mind is not fickle and reposes in the most holy abode;
3. whose contemplation of self is excellent, since this destroys all sorrows; and
4. who has awareness of prana, when practiced steadily, ageing time does not apply, that is, Absolute Being is felt.”

By eliminating mind content and steady practice of pranayama, consciousness attains the Absolute, timeless state. For that, mind should become stainless self—the cause of long life. Then the bite of time fails.

Bhagavad gita

As the unfailing recorder of appearance-stay-disappearance of things, time is identified as Ishwhara. Divisions of time have their beginning and end, but time itself is without beginning. Endlessly flowing and equated with God supreme it is called mahakāla. All existence is in time, but ritual time rooted in nonexistence is different. The ultimate goal of all ritual is to transcend temporal time (Anitya kālā) into ritual time. Mahakāla is characterized by Akarma (no action), Akrama (no order), and Akāla (no time). There are three varieties of akāla are: Kāla in the sense of running time (e.g. ageing processes); kāla in prakriti (Ayurveda); and kāla as the eternal embodiment of knowledge and bliss.

The lord himself is embodied as time: “I am the mighty world destroyer”, is one of the numerous expressions of Vasudeva. All events in nature get buried in time which itself contains all events and all causation. In this existence there are two phases, relative and Absolute. The manifest phenomenal world is relative compared to Absolute existence; eternal, unmanifest, and imperishable. Those who attain it will not return: This is my supreme abode state, the immortal state beyond time. Vasudeva is maha-atman-none is greater than Him. He is Ananta because he transcends time, space, and causation.

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Vaishnaivism

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Brahman. All things are under the shelter of Brahman. Nothing exists independent of it, nothing can surpass it. The state of Brahman is timeless and Absolute. [28]

Nyaya and vāisheshika

Nyaya-Vaiśeṣika (NV) deals mainly physics, chemistry, and other material sciences including reasoning or logic and metaphysical studies, that is, search for knowledge of God. It is partly science and partly philosophy, dealing with nine elementary concepts: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Akāsha, Time, Direction in space, Mind, and Atman.

Definition: Time is inferred from the relation between past (bhūta kāla) and future (bhāvishat kāla), discounting that of place. It is marked by association of an event with the sun's revolution and is measured by kṣhana, dīna, rītus (seasons), ayana, saṃvatsara, etc. Kāla is an entity to be considered when dealing with chemical and physical changes.

NV refers to Soul, Ether, Time, and Space as ViBHO-infinite and indivisible. It offers explanations by example: The ripening of a mango. A mango stored in hay, fruits have their own color and taste good, and color develops on it. If a mango is exposed to hot sun, the fruit ripens quickly; but its qualities are different. A mango exposed to hot air ripens quickest, but lacks good taste. In all three conditions, time is the main factor effecting biochemical changes and has relatively more importance. [29]

Samkhya and yoga

Time is an elemental mental construct (buddhi nirmana), a structure of the mind. Space and time do not exist separately, but are interpenetrating. Space is not like a box, in which all things exist, but is continuous with all objects. All matter has evolved out of space and time. It makes its first physical manifestation as a mode of space. Time is regarded as the original dynamic, existing prior to space and determining its evolution or emergence. Time exists in all products of space in the material/biological worlds. [30]

Visishtādīvādī

Visishtādīvādī accepts time as a real entity, an eternal flow without beginning or end, inseparably associated with everything in the universe. Time is an inseparable attribute of paramātman, it is of two kinds, indivisible or divisible. Indivisible time is similar to Absolute time; divisible time is the mind's projection, the cause of experience of past-present-future. Acceptance of such reality depends on Pramāṇa, valid knowledge, based on perception-inference-verbal testimony. Time is the instrument of God creating experiences in his field of play. In his own eternal sphere, time plays no role as it does here, God himself has no need of time. Time is an accessory cause of transformation of primordial matter and its evolutes; the material cause of its own transformation, for example, nimisha, kāstā, kāla, etc. [31]

Shad darshanas

When a past event occurred, time was in the present. Time, when it is occurring, is always present; and when events will occur, time is future. The apparently three-fold character of time, past-present-future, is one eternal flow without a break, an indivisible unbroken continuity. [32] Experience of time enables the mind to relate what has happened, what is yet to happen, and thus to divide time into past, present, and future; but time's true character is the eternal presence. In reality past and future are also present. [32] Space and time exist with reference to subjective being, the consciousness principle. When consciousness manifests, time assumes spatiotemporal forms, and subjective being becomes mental-Manomaya. Space and time are twin terms of conscious creative intelligence. In speech alone one separates substance from its source, never in fact, never in experience. When self-consciousness becomes manifest, it becomes subject to existence embedded in space-time. The supreme truth is that, without Me there is no space or time, yet My ultimate being has become all space-time: I am everywhere, in all time. [32]

The mahakāla concept, central to Vedic conceptions of time, sets the entire structure of life and living in a different context from that of western science, or indeed almost anything in western thought. As the above examples show, it or a related experience, is an essential feature of the major systems of thought in India. The reason probably boils down to this: Whatever their intellectual persuasion, almost all originators of systems of philosophy in India were trained to experience the mind's silent depths. One of the easiest aspects of those states to experience is the "sense of the eternal". For this, steadiness of mind is required but is not the sole cause; the falling away of trivial concerns, and the expansion of awareness to wider perspectives and larger realms seems to open the door to feelings of eternity, as regular practitioners of appropriate techniques will attest.

The above analysis of the conception of time in the Vedic sciences has been conducted following a series of scientific experiments testing various Jyotish hypotheses which yielded remarkable results. [33][34] Taken as a whole, the experiments provide consistent empirical evidence for the metaphysical effects predicted by Jyotish. Jyotish is often considered a 'Time Science', and the metaphysical forces with which it deals act directly on the Jiva or soul. In order to understand the scientific implications of these experiments more deeply, it is necessary to consider both the nature of time and the nature of the soul as a 'time-space vehicle'. In the foregoing, we focused on the former, the nature of time, as understood in the Vedic sciences, in order to see how it differs from the conception of time in modern western science.

Predictions made by Jyotish can be applied to all life forms. They do not distinguish one animal from another. Furthermore, since its medical predictions apply to individual organs, and to tissues in those organs, it is clear that, if it is valid, Jyotish influences operate at least down to the single cell level. Our experiments tested Jyotish predictions in viral propagation in chick embryos, [33] growth of the anaerobic bacterium, Clostridium chauvoei, [34] and virus propagation in baby hamster kidney (BHK21) cells. [35] In all cases, growth of cells or their resistance to pathology was tested at times considered variously auspicious and inauspicious for life, that is, for the organism concerned. Consistent statistically significant results were obtained throughout, combining to yield very highly significant P-values. [36]

The results suggest that the metaphysical forces treated by Jyotish are at work on all biological organisms at all times. [37] While this first series of experiments has not been extensive enough to define the nature of all such forces, they are sufficient to reject the position of scientific skepticism that no such influences exist, and to do so with a good degree of confidence. Previous experiments, conducted purely
on planetary transits at birth, have strongly suggested that the position of scientific skepticism is not valid; [38] our experiments also point to this being the case. [33],[34],[35],[36]

Conversely, the experiments suggest that a fair degree of confidence can be placed in the existence of metaphysical influences spoken of by Jyotish, both those encoded in planetary positions, [33],[34] and more general ones like Rahukāla. [33],[34],[35],[36] They can apparently produce powerful effects in the lives of anyone anywhere, indeed in any living organism. [37]

Jyotish differs from western astrology in that it is set in the overarching context of the Vedic sciences, those portions of Indian traditional knowledge pertaining to Vedic culture. The entire structure of Vedic culture was designed by its leaders, the Maharishis, to aim at spiritual liberation and immortality. All its 64 arts are designed to progress their students on the path to Moksha; their masters were not true masters unless they were established in enlightenment.

The specific concern of Jyotish is thus with the influence of subtle, planetary vibrations on the subtle body of the organism-human or otherwise. Certain vibrations will strengthen an individual, while others may weaken them. All organisms are subject to such influences, but the specific concern with growth to moksha makes Jyotish a supreme science.

From the perspective of Jyotish, the key to progress on the path to Moksha is energizing the subtle body (Sukshma Sharira) with the correct planetary vibrations in accordance with a person's Jyotish constitution found from the Janma Kundali. This makes it possible to avoid malefic effects in life, and for the Jiva to gain the protection of the Kālapurusha, and rise to the level of the divine, established beyond space-time in mahakāla. For this reason, the Kālapurusha is often equated with the body of Lord Vishnu, the Vishwaswarupa, depicted in [Figure 2]. In fact, all souls are under the command of the supreme purusha, purushottama, something all come to recognize as they rise to that level of consciousness.

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Understanding Jyotish thus requires the ability to relate to and understand the metaphysical. Those progressing on the spiritual path and growing in the experience of the subtle, slowly gain the ability to do so.

Foot Note


References

Mahakala (Sanskrit: महाकाल; IAST: Mahākāla) is a deity common to Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Black-Cloaked Mahākāla. Exhibit in the Asian collection of the American Museum of Natural History, Manhattan, New York City, New York, USA. The homonymous kāla, appointed time, which depending on context can mean death, is distinct from kāla black, the association is seen in a passage from the Mahābhārata, depicting a female figure who carries away the spirits of slain warriors and animals. She is called kālarātri and also kālā, Kālā is also the feminine form of Kāla, an epithet of Shiva, and thus the consort of Shiva. The short answer: a timeless piece of literature is one whose motifs/themes and explorations will always be a struggle or forefront in the human experience. Think The Scarlet Letter, The Picture of Dorian Gray, Moby Dick, The Great Gatsby, etc. wh...Â Most literature is a product of its time and generally doesn't translate well to average people living in a different time. On occasion, though, a piece of writing is crafted so well and with such beauty that people, even ordinary people, still remember and refer to it decades or even generations later. Kāla (काल,