

THE HEAVENLY BODIES (NAVAGRAHA) IN HINDU RITUAL

Gudrun BÜHNEMANN

The nine heavenly bodies (*navagraha*), viz. the sun (*sūrya*), moon (*candra*), Mars (*maṅgala*), Mercury (*budha*), Jupiter (*br̥haspati*), Venus (*śukra*), Saturn (*śani*), the ascending node (*rāhu*), and the descending node of the moon (*ketu*), have been highly respected and venerated as deities up to modern times. They are believed to influence the destinies of human beings according to good and evil aspects in the individual's horoscope. The *navagrahas* are worshipped when passing through bad periods of life¹⁾ caused by unfavourable constellations. They are pacified at the beginning of specific rites to remove obstacles that might occur and to secure the full result of the rite. According to Vaikhanasasmārtasūtra (= VaiSS) 4.14, one should not undertake a ritual without having pacified the heavenly bodies.²⁾ The *navagrahas* are further worshipped to remove diseases believed to be caused by them. Their worship is able to cause rainfall; it also occurs in the context of the acts of black magic (*abhicāra*)³⁾.

The present paper describes the following categories of rituals connected with the heavenly bodies:

- 1 Pacification (*śānti*) rites
- 2 Religious observances (*vrata*) and ritual worship (*pūjā*)
- 3 Ritual repetition of *mantras* (*jaṇa*) and recitation of hymns of praise (*stotra*)
- 4 Special Tantric practices.

1 Pacification (*śānti*) Rites

The most important ritual performed for the *navagrahas* is the 'sacrifice to the heavenly bodies' (*grahayajña/ grahamakha*). This ritual, performed up to today and occurring at the commencement of all *saṃskāras*, such as investing a boy with the sacred thread (*upanayana*) and marriage, enables the performer to secure the fruit of the rite without obstacles coming in his way. Further it can be performed to counter the effects of unfavourable constellations in one's horoscope: "Just as armour protects from the blows of arrows, a pacification rite protects from the strokes of fate."⁴⁾

The *navagrahasānti* mentioned in Yājñavalkyasmṛti (= YS) 1.293-306 is the model of all *śānti* rites in the medieval ritual texts. It also appears in texts like VaiSS 4.13-14, Baudhāyana-Gṛhyaśeṣasūtra (= BGSS) 1.17, and Matsya-

Purāna (=MaP) 93. These texts describe:

- 1 different colours associated with the heavenly bodies
- 2 the position of the individual *grahas* in the *maṇḍala* of worship
- 3 the procedure of worship
- 4 special prescribed offerings.

The following chart shows the colours and directions associated with the *navagrahas* according to the VaiSS, BGSS, and MaP.

<i>graha</i>	colour	direction
sun	red	centre
moon	white	SE
Mars	red	S
Mercury	yellow (blue VaiSS)	NE
Jupiter	yellow	N
Venus	white	E
Saturn	black	W
Rahu	black	SW
Ketu	smoke-coloured (variegated colour BGSS)	NW

The colours are significant when making offerings of flowers or garments to the *navagrahas*, as offerings made to individual heavenly bodies should be of the specific colours associated with them.⁵⁾ The *navagrahas* are also represented in the *maṇḍala* (cf. p. 3) by specific shapes made from their respectively-coloured rice grains. The directions mentioned in the chart pertain to the *grahas* when they are positioned in a *maṇḍala*. In South Indian Temples the *grahas* are arranged around the sun occupying the central position in such a way that they do not face each other. The following chart shows this arrangement and the arrows indicate the direction each *graha* faces.⁶⁾

Mercury ↑	Venus ↑	moon ↓	<div style="text-align: center;"> East⁷⁾ North ← ↑ → South ↓ West </div>
Jupiter ←	sun ↑	Mars →	
Ketu →	Saturn ↓	Rahu →	

In the contemporary Maharaṣṭrian practice the *grahamakha* is usually the last item in a series of rites performed, beginning with:

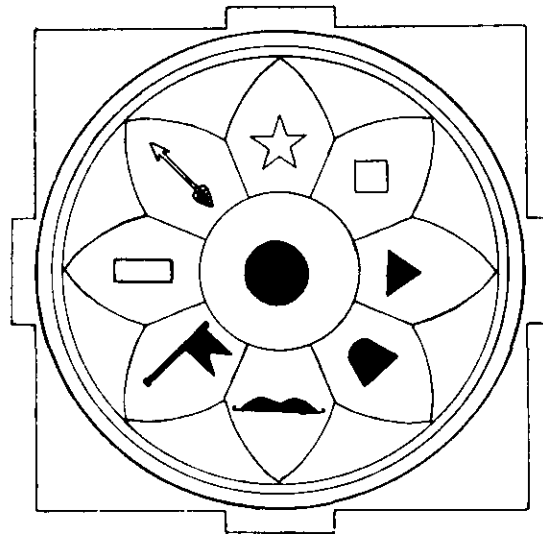
- 1 the worship of Gaṇeśa
- 2 the declaration of an auspicious day (*puṇyāhavacana*)⁸⁾
- 3 the worship of the mother goddesses (*matṛka*)
- 4 the *nandiśraddha*.

The *grahamakha* begins with the ritual purification of a selected place on

which a *maṇḍala* is prepared. The basic pattern of the *maṇḍala* of the nine heavenly bodies (cf. also BGSS 1.17) is an eight-petalled lotus surrounded by circles and a square whose four sides are interrupted by T-shaped entrances (*bhupura*). The heavenly bodies are represented by specific shapes:

<i>graha</i>	shape
sun	circle
moon	square
Mars	triangle
Mercury	arrow
Jupiter	rectangle
Venus	pentagon
Saturn	bow
Rahu	winnowing fan
Ketu	banner.

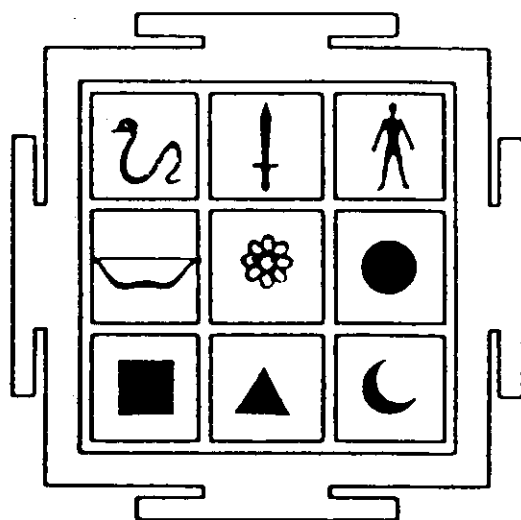
Some of these shapes represent the characteristic attributes (*ayudha*) of specific *grahas*; e. g. the arrow (Mercury) or the bow (Saturn). The circle represents the sun because of the similarity of the shape, while the banner is a characteristic attribute of Ketu as well as a depiction of the primary meaning of the Sanskrit word *ketu*.



This *maṇḍala* is prepared from coloured rice grains on the occasion of the 'sacrifice to the heavenly bodies'. After each of the *navagrahas* is invoked into its specifically-coloured shape, particular fire offerings (*homa*) for each *graha*, accompanied by the recitation of *mantras*, are made.

These specific shapes and directional positions are often seen on popular *navagrahayantras* which are used as objects of worship or are worn around the neck for protection.

A *maṇḍala* based on a different tradition is recorded in the *Maṇḍala-sarvasva*, a handbook on *maṇḍalas* and *yantras*, printed in Puri/Orissa in 1912⁹⁾. This text also describes the *navagrahayantra* called *grahābjamaṇḍala* in which the *grahas* appear in a square divided into nine equal parts and surrounded by one *bhūpura*. This *maṇḍala* is said to correspond to the ground-plan of the Naṭamandira of the Sun Temple of Koṅarka.



The following chart shows the colours and shapes associated with the heavenly bodies and their positions in the *maṇḍala*.

<i>graha</i>	colour	shape	position in the <i>maṇḍala</i>
sun	?	eight-petalled lotus	centre
moon	?	half-moon	SW
Mars	red	triangle	W
Mercury	yellow	bow	N
Jupiter	red	circle	S
Venus	white	square	NW
Saturn	black	man	SE
Rāhu	?	sword	E
Ketu	?	spotted serpent	NE

ular
and

ala-
in
lala
and
the

2 Religious Observances (*vrata*) and Ritual Worship (*pūjā*)

Vratas consist of practices which purify the devotee, such as sleeping on the ground, getting up before dawn, taking a bath, observing specific rules of conduct, performing the ritual worship (*pūjā*) for a particular deity, the fire sacrifice (*homa*), feeding of Brahmins (*brāhmaṇabhojana*), and giving of gifts (*dāna*). The *pūjā* often ends with the reading of a story which narrates the origin of the *vrata* and states the reward (*phalaśruti*) which is gained by the performance of the rite. *Vratas* are described in *dharmaśāstra* texts and in the Purāṇas. The *vratas* consist of practices for individual *grahas*. To give a few examples:

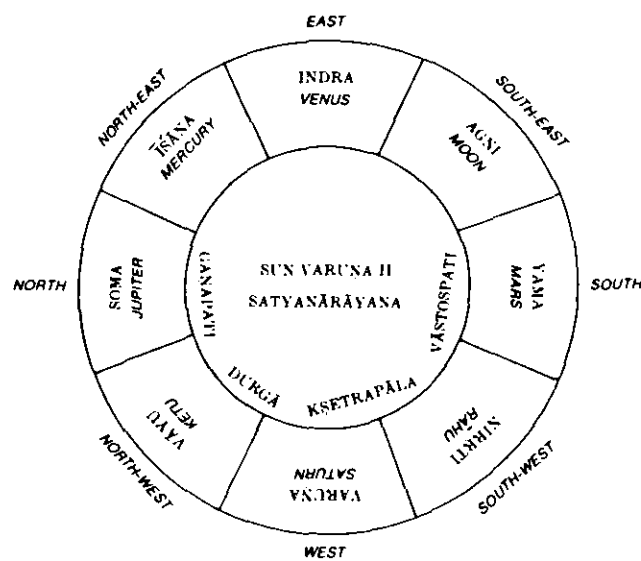
sūryavrata (Vrataraja [= VR], pp. 883,3-886,23)

maṅgalavrata (VR, pp. 914,32-919,4)

śanaīscaravrata (VR, pp. 930,14-933,14).

The *navagrahas* appear as surrounding deities (*āvaraṇadevatā*) in the *puja* of Satyanarayaṇa, a form of Viṣṇu. This is one of the most popular *pujās* in contemporary India.¹⁰⁾ Here Satyanarayaṇa is surrounded by the eight directional guardians (*dikpāla*) and the nine heavenly bodies. The seventeen deities are represented by areca nuts which are arranged in a shallow dish filled with rice (*pūrṇapātra*) and are placed on top of a vessel (*kalaśa*). Varuṇa, as deity of the water in the vessel, is invoked along with Gaṇapati (= Gaṇeśa), Durgā, the 'guardian of the field' (*kṣetrapāla*), and the 'house protector' (*vāstoṣpati*). These deities belong to the group of 'guardian deities of the sacrifice' (*kratusamrakṣakadevatā*).

he



The deity Varuṇa occurs twice in the *maṇḍala*: once as deity of the vessel, placed in the centre, and once as guardian of the Western direction. The worship of the heavenly bodies and the directional guardians as well as the group of 'guardian deities of the sacrifice' is intended to remove obstacles and secure protection from all sides.

3 Ritual Repetition of *mantras* (*japa*) and Recitation of Hymns of Praise (*stotra*)

A *mantra* is a combination of letters believed to be of divine origin and transmitted by a preceptor to a disciple in an initiation ritual. Its repetition to produce a cumulative stream of energy is called *japa*. *Japa* of *mantras*, which are often the names of deities, is a common practice in Hinduism. The *mantras* for the *navagrahas* may come from the Vedic literature or the Puraṇas. The Vedic *mantras* can only be recited by members of the three castes; Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, and Vaiśyas. Their selection differs a little according to the tradition to which one belongs. Thus YS 1.298 and MaP 93.33 prescribe the *mantra* Ṛgveda 1.35.2 for the worship of the sun, while VaiSS 4.14 employs Taittiriya-Saṃhita 3.4.11.2 in its place. At first sight the selection of the Vedic *mantras* seems accidental. However, a closer examination of recited *mantras* reveals that there is a long tradition for their employment in specific contexts, and that their employment is quite meaningful and appropriate in many cases.

The *mantras* from the Purāṇic literature usually consist of single verses taken from hymns of praise (*stotra*) to the *navagrahas*. These *stotras* are ascribed to Puraṇas. There are numerous *stotras* which are popularly recited to pacify the heavenly bodies. The Navagrahastotra attributed to Vyasa¹¹ is well known in Mahārāṣṭra today. It dates back to the 16th cent. as indicated by its occurrence in the Nityacarapradīpa 1, pp. 515,5-516,13 and the Vidyarṇavatāntra 2, p. 747,5-747,17. Each of the nine stanzas in the *stotra* describes and praises one of the heavenly bodies. These *mantras* can be recited separately for a specific number of times to remove obstacles caused by the individual heavenly bodies. The number of repetitions is¹²:

- stanza 1 for the sun: 7,000 times
- stanza 2 for the moon: 11,000 times
- stanza 3 for Mars: 10,000 times
- stanza 4 for Mercury: 19,000 times
- stanza 5 for Jupiter: 19,000 times
- stanza 6 for Venus: 6,000 times
- stanza 7 for Saturn: 23,000 times
- stanza 8 for Rahu: 18,000 times
- stanza 9 for Ketu: 17,000 times.

4 Special Tantric Practices

In Tantrism we come across an elaborate type of worship (*pūjā*) which differs from the rather simple *pūjā* performed by those belonging to the *smārta* tradition of Hinduism. The Tantric texts give special *mantras* employed during worship. In a typical manner, the seer, who has visualized the *mantra*, and the metre, which does not indicate a metrical unit but an inner rhythm, are given. The texts also give detailed instructions for the visualization (*dhyāna*) of the heavenly bodies and their *yantras*.

There is a procedure called 'preliminary ritual' (*puraścaraṇa*) for making the *mantras* effective (*siddha*). It consists of:

- 1 the ritual worship (*pūjā*)
- 2 the repetition of the *mantras* for a specific number of times (*japa*)
- 3 the fire sacrifice (*homa*), preferably with substances thought to be liked by the *navagrahas*
- 4 the offering of water libations (*tarpaṇa*)
- 5 the feeding of Brahmins (*brāhmaṇabhojana*).

When the *mantras* have become effective, which is indicated by certain signs like extraordinary calmness of the mind, joy, absence of sleep, auspicious dreams, etc., they can be employed in special rites to achieve the fulfillment of particular wishes (*kāmyakarma*). Among such rites are the rites of black magic (*abhicāra*): attraction (*ākaraṇa*), subjugation (*vaśikaraṇa*), immobilization (*stambhana*), eradication (*uccaṭana*), liquidation (*māraṇa*), and delusion (*mohana*). The *abhicāra* rites in connection with the heavenly bodies are already mentioned in YS 1.293 and MaP 93.140-156.

Some important Tantric texts dealing with the heavenly bodies are:

- 1 Prapañcasara ascribed to Śaṅkara (chaps. 15-16)
- 2 Prapañcasarasaraṅgraha by Girvaṇendra Sarasvatī (chap. 31)
- 3 Śaradatilakatantra by Lakṣmaṇadeśika (chap. 14)
- 4 Īśanaśivagurudevapaddhati by Īśanaśivagurudevamiśra (*mantrapada*, chap. 42)
- 5 Merutantra (chap. 13)
- 6 Mantramahodadhi by Mahīdhara (chap. 15)
- 7 Mantramahārṇava by Madhavaraya Vaidya (chap. 11).

There is an independent treatise entitled *Tricabhaskara* (1708 A.D.) by Bhaskararaya Makhindra, an authority of Tantra, which elaborates the procedure for worshipping the sun. Surya is believed to be the healer of diseases and the bestower of wishes from very early times. This text prescribes the repetition of the triplet (*trca*) R̥gveda 1.50.11-13 to cure various diseases.

The *navagrahas* are an important but often overlooked area of research. A

detailed study of *navagraha* literature and ritual practices will contribute to the associated Indological fields of astrology, astronomy, iconography, literature, mythology, ritual, and local traditions. Their examination is significant not only for the study of ancient Indian culture, but also for that of contemporary religious practices and beliefs.

NOTES

- 1) Cf. VaiSS 4.13:
grahayatta lokayatra tasmad atmaviruddhe prapte grahan samyak pujayati.
- 2) *grahapujan puraskrtya sarvakarma samarabhed iti vijñayate.*
- 3) Cf. YS 1.293:
*śrīkamaḥ śantikamo va grahayajñam samacaret /
vṛtyayuh puṣṭikamo vā tathairvabhīcaran ripun //*
- 4) MaP 93.81:
*yatha baṇapraharāṇam kavacam bhavati varāṇam /
tadvad daivopaghatanam śantir bhavati varāṇam //*
- 5) Cf. YS 1.297 and MaP 93.18.
- 6) I have observed this arrangement in the *navagraha* shrine in the Kapaleśvara Temple and in a shrine near Royapeeta High Road, both in Madras.
- 7) In accordance with the Indian tradition, the Eastern (and not Northern) direction is shown on top.
- 8) For a description of this ritual, cf. DIEHL (1957).
- 9) Cf. BONER/SARMA/DAS (1972), p. XLVI. The following information is based on the authors' translation of the relevant passage of the *Maṇḍalasarvasva* on pp. 213-214.
- 10) For this *puja*, cf. BÜHNEMANN (1988), pp. 200-213.
- 11) For an edition and English translation of this *stotra*, cf. BÜHNEMANN (1984), pp. 100-101.
- 12) Numbers according to YOGESVARANANDATIRTHA (1970), pp. 387f.

ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BGSS Baudhayana-Gṛhyaśeṣasūtra: The Bodhāyana Gṛhyasūtra (with Bodhayanaḥgṛhyaśeṣasūtra). Ed. R. SHAMA SASTRI. Mysore 1920.
- BONER, A./S. R. SARMA/ R. P. DAS (1972): *New Light on the Sun Temple of Konarka*. Varanasi.
- BÜHNEMANN, G. (1984): *Some Remarks on the Structure and Application of Hindu Sanskrit Stotras*. *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 28, 73-104.
- BÜHNEMANN, G. (1988): *Puja. A Study in Smarta Ritual*. Vienna.
- DIEHL, C. G. (1957): *Punyahavacana*. *Orientalia Suecana* 6, 97-106.
- Isānaśivagurudevapaddhati: The isānaśivagurudevapaddhati by isānaśivagurudevamisra*. Ed. T. GAṆAPATI SĀSTRĪ. 4 Pts. Trivandrum 1920-1925.
- KANE, P. V. (1968-1977): *History of Dharmasāstra*. 5 Vols. (vol. 1 rev. and enl., pt. 1 1968, pt. 2 1975). Poona.
- Mantramaharṇava: Mantramaharṇava. . . madhavarayavaidyasamgrhitā*. Bombay 1984.
- Mantramahodadhī: Mantramahodadhīḥ saṅkha*. Repr. Bombay 1983.
- MaP *Matsya-Purāṇa: Dvaipayanamunipranītam matsyapurāṇam*. Repr. Poona 1981.
- Merutantra: Merutantram. Ojhopakhyapanditaraghunathasāstridvara saṁsodhya tippanyadibhiḥ pariṣkṛtam*. Bombay 1908.
- Nityācarapradīpa: Nityācarapradīpā* by Narasiṁha Vajapeyī. Ed. V. V. BHATTACĀRYYA. 2 Vols. Calcutta 1902-1911.
- Prapañcasāra: Prapañcasāratantra*. With the Commentary *Vivarana* by Padmapadācārya and

Prayogakramadipika. . . revised and documented by A. AVALON and ed. A. SARASVATI. Repr. Delhi 1981.

Prapañcasarasasamgraha: Prapañchasarasasamgraha of Girvanendra Saraswathi. Ed. K. S. SUBRAMANIA SASTRY. 2 Vols. Tanjore 1962-1963.

RAO, T. A. G. (1914-1916): Elements of Hindu Iconography. 2 Vols. Madras.

Śaradatilakatantra: Śrīlakṣmaṇadeśikendraviracitaṃ śaradatilakam. Śrīmadraghavabhaṭṭakṛta-'padārthadarśa'vyakhyasahitam. Ed. M. JHA BAKSHI. Varanasi 1963.

SRINIVASAN, T. N. (1954): A Handbook of South Indian Images. Tirupati.

Tṛcabhaskara: Tṛcabhaskara by Bhaskararaya. Ed. R. G. SATHE. Baroda 1982.

VaiSS Vaikhanasa-Smartasutra: Vaikhanasasmartasutram. Crit. ed. W. CALAND. Calcutta 1927.

Vidyānavatantra: Shrividyānava Tantra. Ed. R. C. KAK/HARABHATTA SHASTRI. 2 Vols. Srinagar 1932-1937.

VR Vrataraja: Vratarajaḥ. . . viśvanathasarmaṇa viracitaḥ. Ed. KHEMARAJ SRIKRṢNADAS. Bombay 1966.

YOGESVARANANDATIRTHA, ŚRĪ SAṆKARĀCĀRYA (1970): Mantraśāstra. Pune.

YS Yajñavalkyasmṛti: Apararkaparabhidhaparadityaviracitaṭkasameta yajñavalkyasmṛtiḥ. 2 Vols. Ed. H. N. APTE. Pune 1903-1904.

(I would like to thank the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Tokyo, and Prof. M. TACHIKAWA, Nagoya, for their support and assistance, which enabled me to research this paper.)

*Postdoctoral Research Fellow
(The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science)
c/o Dept. of Indian Philosophy
University of Nagoya*

SAMBHĀṢĀ

11

名古屋大学印度哲学研究室
Department of Indian Philosophy
University of Nagoya

1989