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DIVINATION

Leafing Through a Life

The mysterious Nadi Shastras saw it all before

Imagine walking into a simple dwelling in India and having someone you have never met pull out an ancient palm leaf and begin reading about your past, telling about the house you were born in and the name of your parents. Hard to believe, but persons are daily unnerved by such details at the Chennai home of Mr. Durai Subburathinam, a "Nadi reader." Nadi astrology is relatively unknown in the West, and even in India it's surrounded by mystery. Thousands of palm-leaf bundles of prophecy, going by the name of Nadi Granthas in Tamil in South India and Bhrigu Samhitas in Sanskrit in the North, expound minute details about a person's life, including their name, caste, occupation, medical problems and remedies for sins committed in the past life. Subburathinam says the existence of the leaves can be traced back at least 2,000 years. Reading the leaves is a hereditary profession, passed down from father to son. The leaves are said to be authored by the Sapta Rishis (seven sages), who long ago used their divine sight to look into the future and give details about the lives of every soul who would one day go for a Nadi reading.

Another theory--different from the idea that leaves exist only for those who will come--is that readings for all possible

horoscopes were written on the leaves. The respected astrologer BV Raman spent many years trying to unravel their mystery. He found most readers were able to give detailed information of one's past up to the present, but only a few could accurately predict the future. The best system, according to Raman, were the 36 Tantra Nadis. Each Tantra Nadi contains 1,588,320 astrological charts, which re-occur every 360 years. A third theory is that kshudra devatas (angels, spirit beings) pass on information about the individual to the Nadi reader.

Raman said, "The correctness of the forecasts depended upon the intensity of the rituals performed and recitation of the mantra to propitiate the devata." Raman cites an example: "The native will be born in a holy city on the coast of the ocean. At the age of 20, he will go to a foreign country. His mother will die at the age of 22 in his absence. He will marry at 13. At 32, he will be a lawyer. He will always speak truth and will be pure in heart. There will be no distinction between his thoughts, words and deeds. Before the age of 65, he will meet the king of the white race. He will resort to fasting for the good of the world and will live beyond the age of 70." These accurate details were on the leaf for Mahatma Gandhi.

In Hoshiapur, Punjab, the Nadi reader casts a chart for the moment you walk in his door and then proceeds to find the appropriate leaf, which may take hours. At Subburathinam's Nadi centre in Chennai, only your thumb print is used. The particular pattern of lines in the center of the thumb is identified, and the corresponding set of palm leaves are then taken.

Subburathinam makes it clear that "We are only Nadi readers. What is written on the leaves is read and explained by us. We ourselves do not add anything. Some clients get irritated when some of the facts are unpleasant. We cannot help it. Common people and VIPs from all walks of life have consulted us. We show them the particular leaf with the predictions, and some of our customers are able to read the leaves on their own. Some even buy their leaves for preservation. The language is poetic, and the script is the same as in the ancient temples. We have only a certain amount of leaves. Natives whose leaves are here will somehow or other come to us at the appropriate age specified on the leaves from any corner of the world. Leaves are there not only for Indians, but also for foreigners belonging to other religions. Whoever is destined to look into the leaves will come to us on his own accord. The very word Nadi in Tamil means 'destined to come on its own accord.' So, we do not advertise for our profession. Whoever is destined to come will come. Faith is the root of our system."

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