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An elephantine memory for stars and numbers

K. Navaratnam: An elephantine memory for stars and numbers

Pundit K. Navaratnam sits across the table waiting for data input, his glasses reflecting my face. We give him the birth date. Within seconds he is describing all the astrological aspects formed by the planetary orbits for that specific time, and how they relate to each other in the Hindu birth chart. It is like the chart lights up in the middle of his brain after all the positions have been mentally computed. "Yes. Yes. These are very good positions. This person is spiritually deep, silent, with powerful energy," he says with a chirpy British accent that is common for Sri Lankans. "Sounds like a nuclear submarine," I joke. He laughs. Yet some things elude him. For his book on numerology he received an honorary doctorate. But he can't remember off hand from which school.

People - especially political climbers - have been beating a path to Navaratnam's door to stick their heads into the future for over two decades. It is in bull's-eye predictions that astrologers establish their reputation - like notches on a telescope that signify how many events you accurately forecast, and have the guts to put in writing. Navaratnam is not modest about his skills, making for a Napoleonic personality at times. "In 1970 a young minister named Premadasa called me down to his office in Colombo. He had read about a successful forecast I had made concerning the ruling party. I told him he would eventually become the president of Sri Lanka, that a 20-year period of success was beginning in 1977." Right on schedule Premadasa landed a plumb ministership in 1977, then became prime minister in 1978 and won the presidency in 1988. Did Navaratnam pick the exact year for Premadasa's presidency. "Yes, I told him. I offered to publish it. He told me, 'No, don't' - apparently fearing back-stabbing.

Pundit Navaratnam no longer lives in Sri Lanka. He moved his entire family to Australia in 1985 as a result of the civil war between Tamil insurgents and the

Singalese national army. "We had an astrological association in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Now our books, our library are all gone," Outside Melbourne he writes articles and books (7 published to date), sees or corresponds with an international roster of clients, and keeps honed by predicting Australian elections. Twice he has hit the mark with the current prime minister.

Navaratnam is now 63 years old, born on March 4, 1927, the 13th of 14 children. His father farmed rice and vegetables on 85 acres and ran a rice-trading business. English was his first love, not astrology. "I read every book in the library. "His prodigious memory was cultivated by memorizing many of the Devaram, sacred hymns to Siva sung by the early Tamil saints. At 18 he met T. Veerakethi, an extraordinary astrologer who had "48,000 stanzas in memory." Navaratnam's innate love of horoscopy suddenly surfaced. He became his apprentice, often wandering out into the fields in the inky darkness to watch the planets circle overhead. Veerakethi told the young tyro his horoscope indicated expertise in astrology. At that time, it was still an amateur hobby. He became an English teacher at age 23, then two years later won a position as rural development officer, staying with that service for 22 years. Astrology was at first done as a lark for friends. He polished his skills mainly by reading H.R. Sheshastri Iyer of Bangalore - "I was my own master then," he exclaims. In 1961 he cast his first professional horoscope.

He knew though that his education was still not finished. Reading, even for 8 years, wasn't enough. An opportunity came in his career to go to South India, to visit Bangalore. He met Sheshastri and ended up staying six months with him.

Navaratnam is one of a small coterie of astrologers who are also experts in numerology. He says he studied, again through books, western numerology, then adapted it to the Hindu system. He claims his book Numerology: Key to Success is the best of its kind. "I introduced the moon, corresponding to number 2 into the system." For numerology he uses the individual's birth date and name, transliterated into English, each character assigned a digit. Years ago he created a numeral system for the Tamil alphabet of 247 characters, which offers a much larger range of data. But he was unable to work it into a full methodology.

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