



## Astrology in Verse: Ethical Memory and Cultural Resonance Across Traditions

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### Article Info

**ISSN (Online):** 2582-7138

**Impact Factor (RSIF):** 7.98

**Volume:** 06

**Issue:** 06

**November - December 2025**

**Received:** 09-10-2025

**Accepted:** 10-11-2025

**Published:** 07-12-2025

**Page No:** 1022-1026

### Abstract

This paper reconstitutes astrology not as superstition but as a wisdom tradition sustained through poetry. It advances a distinctive framework-astrology as poetic practice-in which verse becomes a vessel of cultural memory and ethical reflection. Drawing on the Vedic principles of Rta (cosmic harmony) and Dharma (justice), the study locates South Asian inheritance within a global lineage of astrological poetics, from Manilius's *Astronomica* and Sarrocchi's exchanges with Galileo to Roman prophetic verse. Through comparative textual analysis and a contemporary case study, Betel and the Birth Chart shows how cosmic inheritance is inscribed within everyday ritual imagery and poetic rhythm. By condensing celestial order into metaphor, silence, and performance, poetry perpetuates astrology's dignity while opening up new horizons of interdisciplinary dialogue across philosophy, sociology, psychology, and performance studies. The paper concludes by pointing toward broader implications for pedagogy, comparative cosmology, and contemporary aesthetic practice.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2025.6.6.1022-1026>

**Keywords:** Astrological Inheritance, Cosmic Order, Dharma, Celestial Poetics, Cultural Memory, Performance Studies, Comparative Cosmology, Interdisciplinary Poetics

### 1. Introduction

Astrology has long been part of South Asian traditions as a symbolic language of cosmic order. Rather than reducing it to prediction, scholars emphasize its ethical dimensions through the Vedic concept of Rta, or cosmic order (Panda <sup>[5]</sup>), and Dharma, or justice and righteousness Kaul <sup>[4]</sup>. Doniger places astrology within Hinduism's layered traditions; thus, ritual and cosmology are intertwined <sup>[1]</sup>. Such interpretive richness is not necessarily particular to South Asia. In antiquity, for example, Marcus Manilius' *Astronomica* articulated astrology entirely within poetic form, merging celestial science with symbolic aesthetics <sup>[16]</sup>. Meredith Ray demonstrates how Margherita Sarrocchi's correspondence with Galileo interlaced astrology, astronomy, and poetics in seventeenth-century Italy <sup>[17]</sup>. David Wray's examination of Roman traditions further shows how astrology was wrapped inside poetry as prophecy and cultural power <sup>[18]</sup>. These precedents affirm that poetry has long been a vessel for astrological insight and thus sustained its dignity and symbolic resonance across cultures.

Within this lineage, the present study turns to a contemporary case: Betel and the Birth Chart. This poem condenses cosmic order into everyday cultural symbols, showing how astrology's ethical and symbolic dimensions can be lived through verse. By rooting cosmic inheritance in imagery of ritual and chart, the poem shows how poetry transforms astrology into aesthetic and performative experience. This case study grounds the paper's distinctive contribution: to signal poetry as a medium that sustains astrology's dignity while opening it to interdisciplinary analysis. From this ground, the paper moves toward broader prospects, suggesting how astrology-poetics can be extended through comparative cosmologies, pedagogy, and performance. The argument here unfolds as one arc, tracing a lineage of astrological poetics, entwining in lived practice. Thus, clarifying its scholarly contribution and pointing toward future horizons.

This paper actively contributes to existing scholarship by emphasizing astrology not as superstition or doctrine but as ancient wisdom embodied deeply in poetry. Unlike prior studies that analyze astrology through philosophy, sociology, psychology, or ritual, this work highlights verse as the medium through which cosmic order and ethical responsibility are lived and remembered. The study puts South Asian inheritance alongside global precedents like Manilius's *Astronomica* and Sarrocchi's poetic exchanges with Galileo, establishing an astrological poetics lineage bridging cultural inheritance with interdisciplinary dialogue. While most scholarship to date has focused on astrology as a belief system, this study changes the frame by considering instead astrology as a poetic practice; it extends existing work on astrology as cultural practice by establishing a lineage of astrological poetics across cultures, continuous both with ancient precedents and with verse written today.

While Doniger's account of astrology within Hindu ritual and cosmology specifies how symbolic systems sustain cultural practice, this study extends her insight in important ways by emphasizing poetry as the vessel through which such symbolic memory is carried. Furthermore, the reframing advanced here is supported by Hutcheon's notion of parody and Weber's view of cultural practices as collective structures, both of which clarify poetic form is not ornament but a constitutive medium through which astrology's ethical and cosmological dignity is lived and remembered.

This reframing is further supported by the notion of parody proposed by Hutcheon and the view of Weber concerning cultural practices as collective structures, while explaining that poetic form is not ornament but a constitutive medium through which astrology's ethical and cosmological dignity is lived and remembered. Indeed, Ricoeur's reflections on narrative as cultural memory<sup>[19]</sup> and the theory of cultural remembrance provided by Assmann<sup>[20]</sup> extend this insight, underlining the capability of poetry to act as a vessel of symbolic inheritance. Building on Doniger's account of astrology as ritual cosmology, this study shifts the emphasis from ritual practice to poetry as the vessel of cultural memory. Whereas Hutcheon interprets parody as intertextual play, here parody in astrological verse is reframed as ethical reflection, sustaining dignity while reimagining tradition. Extending Weber's view of cultural practices as symbolic structures, the argument shows how poetic form itself encodes collective values with rhythm, metaphor, and silence functioning as sociological carriers of meaning. In this way, the study enters into dialogue with existing scholarship while clarifying its distinctive contribution: astrology is not only a belief system but also a poetic practice that embodies cultural inheritance and ethical resonance.

## 2. Astrology as Ancient Wisdom

It is difficult to conceive of astrology, whether in Vedic or Hindu contexts, without the idea of cosmic order. The Vedas present *Rta* as the source of universal harmony that sustains natural rhythms and moral life alike. Panda maintains that *Rta* is not merely a cosmological principle but also an ethical attitude that governs human activity<sup>[5]</sup>. From this perspective, astrology seems a symbolic system that harmonizes heavenly rhythms with moral obligation.

The ethical dimension is further illuminated through Dharma. Kaul situates Dharma as righteousness and justice, underlining its formative role in shaping ancient Indian thought<sup>[4]</sup>. Informed by Dharma, astrology becomes a

framework of moral consequence rather than a deterministic script. Reinforcing this, Doniger shows how astrology has been woven into ritual, myth, and cultural practice<sup>[1]</sup>.

Comparable traditions echo this interpretive richness. Garfield's engagement with Buddhism demonstrates that cosmic order is often treated as symbolic ethics rather than prediction<sup>[2]</sup>. Greco-Roman *Moirai*, Chinese *Dao* and *Tian*, and Islamic *Ilm al-Nujum* likewise connect celestial order to moral responsibility. To treat astrology with respect is to recognize it as cultural inheritance, a wisdom tradition that encodes ethical and cosmological insight.

Garfield's engagement with Buddhism shows that cosmic order is in any case generally considered a symbolic ethics rather than a predictive enterprise<sup>[2]</sup>. Geertz's explanation of religion as a cultural system<sup>[21]</sup> gives this view more weight, by detailing through what means symbols carry ethical significance. Eliade's work on sacred time and cosmic history<sup>[22, 23]</sup> provides further support to this conclusion that astrology carries moral responsibility in its relation to the sacred.

## 3. Comparative Cosmologies

The poetic articulation of astrology, though rooted in the study of South Asian inheritance, resonates universally. Manilius had dramatized fate and cosmic order in Roman verse in his *Astronomica*<sup>[16]</sup>. In early modern Europe, Sarrocchi's letters reveal the entanglement of astrology with poetic and philosophical discourse<sup>[17]</sup>. Wray brings to light how Roman poets used astrology for prophecy and as a form of cultural symbolism<sup>[18]</sup>. These illustrate that the symbolic language of fate and responsibility in astrology is a shared human inheritance.

In Greco-Roman thought, *Moirai*, or fate, links cosmic order to moral responsibility and is often dramatized in tragedy. It is a known fact that in Chinese cosmology, *Dao* and *Tian* locate governance in the concord between heaven's rhythms and earthly conduct. In Islamic thought, *Ilm al-Nujum* incorporates astrology into philosophy and theology in a way that balances divine knowledge with human accountability. These comparative views extend the horizon without losing sight of the core: the Vedic principles of *Rta* and *Dharma* remain central but locating the astrology-poetics within this global constellation of cosmologies, the framework honors cultural dignity while opening space for dialogue across traditions.

These comparativist vistas broaden our view without losing sight of the core. The Vedic principles of *Rta* and *Dharma* remain central, yet by embedding astrology-poetics within a global constellation of cosmologies, the framework honors cultural dignity, opening up space for inter-tradition dialogue. This lineage is continued up to modernist and Latin American traditions, as Yeats's *A Vision*<sup>[26]</sup> and the subsequent scholarship<sup>[27]</sup> make clear, while Vallejo's cosmic imagery<sup>[28]</sup> and studies of Latin American poetics<sup>[29]</sup> demonstrate the ongoing vitality of celestial symbolism in contemporary verse.

When reviewing recent scholarships visibility continues to a global resonance. As recent approaches, during 2023 issue of *Alif* in *Journal of Comparative Poetics* foregrounds the manner in which poetic traditions across the Middle East and beyond encode cultural inheritance and ethical reflection. This affirms that astrology-poetics falls squarely within a broader comparative field in which verse functions as a vessel of symbolic dignity.

#### 4. Poetic Uniqueness

Unlike philosophy or sociology, which analyze cosmic order in abstract terms, poetry condenses cultural inheritance into metaphor, rhythm, and silence. This can be seen not only in South Asian verse but also in Manilius's *Astronomica*, which rendered astrological instruction into poetic rhythm<sup>[16]</sup>, as well as in Sarrocchi's exchanges with Galileo, which show how astrology's symbolic richness was sustained through literary form<sup>[17]</sup>. Wray's analysis of Roman poetry underlines the ways in which verse dramatized astrology as prophecy and collective meaning<sup>[18]</sup>. Together, these precedents insist on the singularity of poetry as a medium transmuting astrology's symbolic language into lived aesthetic experience.

For example, in *Betel and the Birth Chart*, the line "leaf folded in silence" enacts destiny's ineffability through imagery and rhythm. In *Karmic Ease in Loyal Silence*, repetition dramatizes karmic balance as restraint. Pending Karma: A Cosmic Audit juxtaposes bureaucratic diction with cosmic justice, reimagining accountability in contemporary terms. Even in satire, astrology's dignity is sustained.

These works realize Hutcheon's idea of parody as intertextual play, which honors and simultaneously reimagines tradition<sup>[3]</sup>. While metaphor is to do with ineffability, rhythm dramatizes balance, brevity enacts restraint, parody reimagines tradition. Poetry does this by answering destiny with silence, balancing with brevity. Further contributes freedom with rhythm and tradition with parody.

These researches affirm the uniqueness of poetry as a medium that transforms astrology's symbolic language into living aesthetic experience. As Ricoeur and Assmann remind us, poetry sustains cultural memory, while Yeats and Vallejo illustrate how modern poets dramatize cosmic inheritance through verse.

#### 5. Interdisciplinary Resonances

The depth of astrology-poetics increases when set in dialogue with several disciplines. Each lens adds to its symbolic dignity.

##### 5.1. Philosophy

Silvestre frames it between fatalism and freedom<sup>[11]</sup>; Trang discusses the duality of its function in Buddhist thought<sup>[14]</sup>. The *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Vedānta* are amongst those classical Indian texts which clearly emphasize concord with cosmic order in freedom, or freedom as liberation through knowledge. Poetry allows metaphorical and rhythmical voice to these strains.

##### 5.2. Sociology

Weber regards cultural practices as symbolic structures that constitute collective life<sup>[15]</sup>. Poetry makes astrology a sociological text in which shared values are encoded into ritual imagery.

##### 5.3. Psychology

Karma as responsibility shapes ethics and identity: Titoria<sup>[13]</sup>, *Psychology Magazine*<sup>[12]</sup>. The poetry dramatizes inner states of silence, anticipation, and awe in responding to cosmic justice.

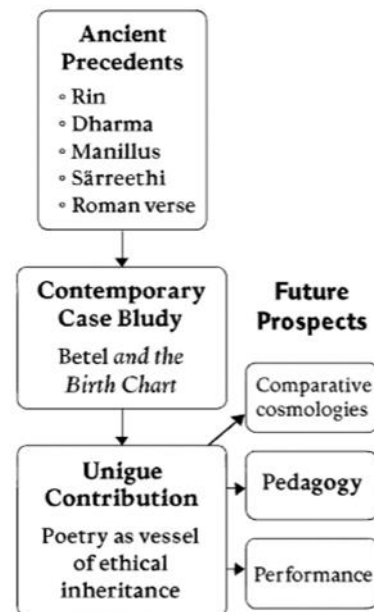
##### 5.4. Performance Studies

Schechner's notion of "restored behavior" locates poetry in ritualized performance<sup>[10]</sup>. The thought of Turner on ritual as

social drama<sup>[24]</sup> and the analysis by Bell on ritual practice<sup>[25]</sup> further develop this perspective, illustrating in detail how recitation becomes a performative gesture which connects art to ritual.

Taken together, these essays show how astrology-poetics maintains symbolic dignity while opening itself to interdisciplinary investigation.

#### 6. Case Study: Betel and the Birth Chart



**Fig 1:** Lineage of Astrological Poetics: from ancient wisdom to future horizons through poetry and cultural inheritance.

This paper examines a modern poem, entitled *Betel and the Birth Chart*. I have chosen this poem not because it is a work of great literary prestige but because of its cultural resonance: it is publicly available and serves as a public artifact, illustrating how popular poetry can bear ethical and symbolic significance. Rather than presenting astrology as an abstract doctrine, this poem conveys it as lived experience through images of ritual and poetic meter.

Two symbols shape the poem's vision of cosmic order. The betel leaf, used in auspicious rituals becomes a metaphor for continuity and cultural inheritance, whereas the birth chart mapping celestial positions at the moment of birth evokes unseen fate and divine silence. These images together form a sense of astrology as cultural wisdom. The brevity shown in the poem is a reflection of the ineffability of destiny, its rhythm, an incarnation of the tension between determinism and freedom.

Sociologically, the ritual-chart pairing encodes shared values. The imagery psychologically invites reflection on the themes of responsibility and anticipation. In a performative vein, reciting the poem is a ritualized encounter with cosmic order. Philosophically, it gestures toward the ethical weight of fate and choice. Thus, the ethical, cultural, psychic, and performative dimensions are brought together within a single aesthetic gesture.

As Figure 1 shows, the case study is situated at the center of a larger lineage of astro-poetics. It mediates between ancient wisdom and global resonances with contemporary practice, thus making clear how poetry is a vessel of ethical inheritance and opens the passageways toward comparative,

pedagogical, and performative horizons.

The ritually paired use of chart and ritual encodes values at the sociological level. Psychologically, images allow reflection on responsibility and anticipation. Performatively, the poem's recitation is a ritualized encounter with cosmic order. Philosophically, it gestures toward an ethical weight of fate and choice. Such an encoding of collective inheritance through symbols is clarified by the theory of cultural memory proposed by Assmann<sup>[20]</sup>; the ritually performed dimension of recitation is noted by Turner<sup>[24]</sup> and Bell<sup>[25]</sup>.

## 7. Unique Contribution

This study advances a distinctive framework by reframing astrology as poetic practice, where verse functions as a vessel of cultural memory and ethical reflection. By situating South Asian inheritance within a global lineage and grounding the argument in the case study Betel and the Birth Chart, the paper demonstrates how poetry sustains astrology's dignity while opening new horizons for comparative cosmology, pedagogy, and interdisciplinary dialogue.

## 8. Conclusion

Astrology is understood and interpreted in the form of ancient wisdom and connects human life with the rhythms of the universe. It is poetry that gives this wisdom living form, turning symbolic language into aesthetic and performative experience. Across traditions, from Manilius's Roman verse to Sarrocchi's seventeenth-century letters, astrology has been carried by poetry as a vessel of cultural inheritance. Case study of Betel and the Birth Chart demonstrate how ritual imagery can interpret destiny as lived expression. This further confirms that poetry embodies tensions between determinism and freedom, dramatizes responsibility and encodes collective values.

By placing astrology within poetry honors the ethical and cosmological depth of astrology. Further these proceeds toward interdisciplinary dialogue. Future related work could be extending this lineage through comparative study, pedagogy, and performance, securing astrology's continued life as a poetic tradition connecting cultural inheritance with scholarly inquiry.

This lineage can be extended by future work through comparative study, pedagogy, and performance in order to ensure that astrology goes on living as a poetic tradition; this is where cultural inheritance is joined with scholarly endeavor. Yeats's *A Vision*<sup>[26, 27]</sup>, the cosmic imagery of Vallejo<sup>[28]</sup>, and Assmann's reflections on cultural memory<sup>[20]</sup> confirm that poetry sustains symbolic inheritance across time and traditions.

## 9. Future Studies

Building on the unique contribution of this study, further research may extend the lineage of astrology expressed through poetry in various ways. Comparative cosmologies remain one direction of great promise. Traditions such as Greco-Roman Moira, Chinese Dao and Tian, and Islamic Ilm al-Nujum indicate that cultures worldwide have often connected the stars with questions of fate and responsibility. Locating South Asian astrology-poetics within a dialogue with these traditions is likely to help shape a global field of celestial poetics where symbolic dignity is shared among cultures.

Pedagogy offers another horizon. Poetry with astrology can be taught not only as literature but also as cultural heritage.

This approach encourages students to see verse in classrooms both as aesthetic form and as ethical reflection, connecting personal experience with cosmic order. By doing so, such teaching foments interdisciplinary learning across philosophy, sociology, psychology, and performance studies. Performance and practice are also offering new avenues. This is true in recitation, ritual enactment, and artistic adaptation show how astrology-poetics can come alive in festivals, theater, and digital spaces. Contemporary research emphasizes technical merit of how poetry preserves astrology's cultural prestige today.

Recent field work on Cultural Anthropology (2024) has underlined the ways through which Indigenous cosmologies sustain cultural memory through ritual and symbolic continuity. These settings of astrology-poetics in conversation with these voices opens new horizons for comparison and pedagogy, in a way how poetry might be taught and performed as cultural heritage across traditions. Finally, further research can refine the framework itself. In this way, comparative textual analysis, ethnographic study, and creative practice will keep astrology-poetics sensitive to cultural inheritance and evolving scholarly dialogue. The framework remains a living bridge between ancient wisdom and modern inquiry, extending into new horizons of comparative, pedagogical, and performative engagement.

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#### How to Cite This Article

Samarathunga W, Ransen R. Astrology in verse: ethical memory and cultural resonance across traditions. *Int J Multidiscip Res Growth Eval*. 2025;6(6):1022–1026. doi:10.54660/IJMRGE.2025.6.6.1022-1026.

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