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## **From Khanar Bachan to Astro-AI: A Sociological Study of Astrology, Divination, Gender, Religious Communities, and Cultural Knowledge in Contemporary West Bengal**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The continuing popularity of astrology and related forms of divination in contemporary society presents an important sociological question. Despite scientific advancement, technological modernization, and the rapid expansion of digital culture, practices such as astrology, tarot reading, numerology, gemstone consultation, Vastu Shastra, and online horoscope systems continue to shape everyday life. This paper examines these practices within urban and peri-urban communities of West Bengal and explores how predictive knowledge systems remain socially meaningful in contemporary society. Drawing upon C. Wright Mills' concept of Sociological Imagination, Durkheim's theory of Social Facts, Alfred Schutz's phenomenology, and the Sociology of Everyday Life, the study analyzes how astrology functions as a mechanism for emotional reassurance, uncertainty management, cultural continuity, and identity formation. The paper also explores the intersections of religion, gender, indigenous knowledge traditions, and digital spirituality, with particular reference to Khanar Bachan and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). Using a qualitative and case study-based methodology, the study demonstrates that astrology in contemporary West Bengal is not simply a remnant of traditional belief but a dynamic social institution continuously reshaped through social media, consumer culture, and

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## Introduction

The relationship between tradition and modernity has long remained a central concern within sociology. Classical sociologists such as Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber believed that modernization, industrialization, and scientific rationality would gradually weaken traditional systems of belief. However, contemporary societies reveal a more complex reality. Traditional forms of knowledge and belief have not disappeared; instead, they have adapted themselves to changing social and technological environments.

Astrology provides a striking example of this transformation. In present-day India, astrology continues to influence marriage negotiations, business decisions, educational choices, travel planning, property purchases, and even interpersonal relationships. At the same time, digital technologies have changed how astrology is practiced and consumed. Mobile applications now generate instant horoscope readings, social media circulates zodiac-based identity narratives, and artificial intelligence increasingly produces compatibility reports and personalized predictions.

Alongside astrology, practices such as tarot reading, numerology, face reading, gemstone consultation, and Vastu Shastra have become increasingly visible among urban and educated populations. These developments challenge the assumption that scientific advancement necessarily reduces faith in predictive systems. Rather, they suggest that individuals continue to seek symbolic reassurance, emotional support, and interpretive meaning in situations of uncertainty.

West Bengal offers a particularly significant context for examining these developments. Bengal has historically been associated with intellectual modernity, scientific inquiry, and social reform movements, yet it also preserves rich traditions of cosmological knowledge, folk wisdom, and indigenous epistemologies. Traditional astrology coexists with digital spirituality, social media influencers, online consultation platforms, and AI-generated prediction systems. The region is also closely associated with *Khanar Bachan*, a collection of aphorisms attributed to the legendary woman scholar Khana, whose sayings combine agricultural knowledge, ecological observation, and cosmological understanding.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified public engagement with spiritual and predictive practices. During periods of fear, isolation, and uncertainty, many individuals turned toward astrologers, tarot readers, horoscope applications, and online spiritual communities seeking reassurance and emotional



guidance. Simultaneously, the rise of Astro-AI introduced new questions concerning technology, trust, expertise, and spirituality in contemporary society.

Against this background, the present study examines astrology and related divinatory practices as socially meaningful cultural phenomena embedded within everyday life. Rather than evaluating whether predictive claims are scientifically “true” or “false,” the paper explores how astrology functions socially and emotionally within contemporary Bengal.

### **Rationale and Context of the Study**

The study is motivated by several contemporary developments that reveal the continuing social significance of astrology and divination. One important development is the rapid expansion of digital astrology. Mobile applications, YouTube astrologers, Instagram influencers, and AI-generated horoscope systems have transformed astrology from a localized and interpersonal practice into a globally accessible digital phenomenon.

These developments challenge conventional assumptions regarding rationality and belief. Technology has not eliminated spirituality; rather, it has become one of the primary mediums through which spirituality is circulated, consumed, and normalized.

The growing popularity of alternative forms of divination among urban populations also strengthens the relevance of the study. Tarot reading, numerology, face reading, and spiritual counselling are increasingly visible among students, professionals, entrepreneurs, and middle-class youth negotiating anxieties related to relationships, careers, emotional well-being, and future uncertainty.

The commercialization of astrology further reveals its sociological significance. Across urban and peri-urban West Bengal, jewellery stores frequently employ astrologers who recommend gemstones and planetary remedies. Gemstones such as sapphire, ruby, emerald, pearl, and coral are purchased not merely as ornaments but as symbolic objects associated with prosperity, emotional stability, health, and protection. Astrology therefore increasingly intersects with consumer culture and emotional economies.

The study is also influenced by the growing academic interest in Indian Knowledge Systems. Traditions such as Jyotisha, Vastu Shastra, Ayurveda, and Khanar Bachan are increasingly recognized as important repositories of indigenous knowledge. However, limited sociological attention has been devoted to understanding how these traditions are interpreted, negotiated, and transformed within contemporary social life.



## Review of Literature

The study of astrology and predictive knowledge systems has gradually gained attention within sociology, anthropology, religion, media studies, and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). Earlier scholarship often interpreted astrology through the frameworks of superstition, ritual practice, and religious belief. Classical sociologists such as Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, and Berger and Luckmann emphasized that systems of belief survive because they are socially institutionalized and culturally legitimized. Similarly, Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* demonstrated that divination often functions as a socially meaningful response to uncertainty and crisis.

Research on Indian astrology has primarily focused on Jyotisha, ritual timing, horoscope matching, and cosmological traditions. Studies related to Indian Knowledge Systems increasingly position astrology within interconnected traditions of spirituality, ecology, healing, and ritual practices. Such scholarship demonstrates the continuing relevance of astrology, Vastu Shastra, and gemstone consultation in contemporary India.

Recent studies have also highlighted the transformation of astrology within digital culture. Research on astrology applications, AI-generated horoscope systems, and social media spirituality demonstrates how predictive knowledge is increasingly mediated through technology. Studies such as *Digital Astrology in the 21st Century*, *Astrological Belief and Decision-Making in the Digital Age*, and *Usage, Reliability and Influence of Astrology Applications among Youth and Adults* show that Millennials and Generation Z increasingly engage with astrology through online platforms and digital applications.

The emergence of Astro-AI has generated further academic interest in technologically mediated spirituality. Research on AI-based astrology systems suggests that technology is transforming rather than replacing traditional predictive practices. AI-generated compatibility analysis, digital horoscope systems, and personalized prediction platforms increasingly shape contemporary spiritual consumption.

Media discourse further reveals the growing visibility of astrology within youth culture and social media environments. Newspaper reports and magazine articles discussing AI astrology platforms, zodiac-based identity culture, and online spirituality suggest that astrology increasingly functions as a form of emotional reassurance, symbolic identity construction, and digital companionship.

Within the Bengali context, horoscope sections and astrology archives in regional newspapers such as *Anandabazar Patrika* demonstrate the normalization of astrology, numerology, Vastu practices, and ritual timing within everyday Bengali culture. The growing popularity of tarot reading, Western astrology,



Feng Shui, and digital spiritual platforms among urban middle-class populations further illustrates the hybrid coexistence of traditional and modern spiritual practices.

Another important body of literature concerns indigenous knowledge traditions such as Khanar Bachan. Khana's sayings represent ecological wisdom, agricultural knowledge, climate observation, and women's intellectual contribution within Bengali history. However, limited sociological research has explored how these traditions continue to survive and acquire meaning within contemporary society.

Despite the growing literature on astrology, digital spirituality, and Indian Knowledge Systems, important gaps remain. Existing studies often examine astrology, technology, religion, gender, and indigenous knowledge separately. Very few studies bring together astrology, Astro-AI, gender relations, emotional well-being, consumer culture, and indigenous epistemologies within a single sociological framework, particularly in the context of West Bengal. The present study attempts to address this gap.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study draws upon multiple sociological perspectives to understand astrology as a socially meaningful institution rather than merely a personal belief system.

C. Wright Mills' concept of Sociological Imagination helps connect personal experiences with broader social structures. Decisions related to marriage, careers, relationships, housing, and family life may appear individual and personal, yet they are deeply shaped by cultural norms, collective expectations, and social institutions. Astrology often functions as a symbolic framework through which individuals interpret uncertainty and organize life decisions.

Durkheim's concept of Social Facts helps explain how astrology operates as a collectively institutionalized cultural practice. Practices such as horoscope matching and ritual timing persist not simply because of personal faith but because they are socially normalized and culturally legitimized.

Alfred Schutz's phenomenology directs attention toward lived experiences, subjective meanings, and everyday interpretations associated with uncertainty, destiny, and emotional insecurity. The Sociology of Everyday Life further explains how astrology becomes normalized through routine practices such as reading horoscopes, consulting astrologers, discussing zodiac signs, or following astrology-based social media content.



Pierre Bourdieu's concept of Cultural Capital is also relevant in understanding how astrologers, tarot readers, spiritual influencers, and gemstone consultants acquire symbolic authority through specialized forms of knowledge and cultural legitimacy.

## Methodology

The study adopts a predominantly qualitative and case study-based methodological framework. Since the research seeks to understand meanings, lived experiences, interpretations, and social interactions associated with astrology and divination, qualitative methods were considered most appropriate. The study is interpretive and exploratory in nature and focuses on how predictive knowledge systems continue to shape everyday social life in contemporary Bengal.

The research was conducted across selected urban and peri-urban regions of Kolkata, South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Howrah, and Hooghly. These regions were chosen because they represent diverse social and cultural environments where traditional cosmological practices coexist with technological modernization, digital spirituality, and expanding consumer culture.

Several interconnected case studies were examined during the research process. These included astrology and marriage negotiations, gemstone consultation and jewellery-store astrologers, Vastu Shastra and housing decisions, tarot reading and urban spirituality, Khanar Bachan and indigenous knowledge traditions, and Astro-AI along with digital astrology platforms. These case studies enabled the researcher to understand how predictive systems operate within different dimensions of social life, including family relations, emotional well-being, consumer behaviour, spirituality, and digital culture.

Data collection relied on in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, life-history narratives, and digital ethnography. Interviews were conducted with astrologers, tarot readers, Vastu consultants, jewellery-store astrologers, students, homemakers, professionals, elderly community members, religious leaders, and users of digital astrology services. These interviews helped capture personal experiences, emotional meanings, social attitudes, and everyday practices associated with astrology and divination.

Participant observation was undertaken in astrology centres, jewellery establishments, tarot-reading sessions, spiritual gatherings, and online prediction communities. Observational methods helped document ritual practices, symbolic interactions, consumer engagement, and everyday conversations surrounding predictive systems. Informal conversations and field notes were also incorporated to understand meanings that may not emerge through formal interviews alone.



Digital ethnography formed another important aspect of the study. Astrology applications, Instagram spiritual influencers, YouTube astrologers, online horoscope communities, and AI-generated prediction systems were analyzed to understand how predictive knowledge circulates within digital spaces. This approach helped examine how younger generations engage with digital spirituality and how traditional belief systems are reconfigured through social media culture and emerging technologies.

Although primarily qualitative, the study proceeded with certain working sociological assumptions. The study assumes that astrology and related predictive practices continue to influence everyday decision-making, emotional well-being, and social relationships despite modernization and scientific advancement. It further assumes that digital technologies, social media, and Astro-AI are transforming traditional predictive knowledge systems rather than replacing them in contemporary society.

### **Case Study-Based Analysis**

The findings of the study demonstrate that astrology and related forms of divination frequently move beyond rigid religious boundaries and become integrated into shared cultural practices across urban and peri-urban Bengal. Rather than functioning only as systems of religious belief, astrology and predictive practices operate as mechanisms for emotional reassurance, uncertainty management, symbolic identity formation, and cultural continuity.

Among Hindu communities, horoscope matching, ritual timing, gemstone consultation, palmistry, and Vastu Shastra remain deeply embedded within everyday life. Marriage negotiations, business inaugurations, property purchases, and housewarming ceremonies frequently involve astrological consultation, even among educated middle-class families. Respondents often described astrology as a source of “mental peace” and emotional confidence during uncertain situations.

One respondent from Kolkata remarked:

“We are educated people, but before marriage or buying property we still consult astrologers because it gives mental peace.”

This finding reflects Durkheim’s argument that collectively shared beliefs continue to exert social influence even within modern societies. Astrology therefore functions as a socially normalized institution rather than simply a private belief.

The commercialization of astrology also emerged strongly during the study. Jewellery stores, online consultation platforms, and spiritual counselling centres increasingly market astrology as both a spiritual



and consumer-oriented service. Several jewellery-store astrologers explained that customers often purchase gemstones after facing anxiety related to careers, relationships, finances, or health.

One astrologer explained:

“Customers come because they feel emotionally disturbed or uncertain. They believe gemstones can reduce negativity and improve confidence.”

This demonstrates how astrology intersects with consumer culture and emotional economies. Gemstones and spiritual remedies are not viewed only as ritual objects but also as symbolic commodities associated with hope, healing, positivity, and self-improvement.

The study also revealed variations across religious communities. Among sections of Muslim communities, astrology was often approached cautiously because of theological concerns. However, practices such as numerology, ta’wiz, spiritual healing, dream interpretation, and folk divination continued to exist within everyday social life.

A respondent from Howrah stated:

“Astrology may not be openly accepted religiously, but people still believe in lucky numbers and spiritual protection.”

This suggests that predictive practices often survive through family traditions, folk culture, and informal social practices rather than through formal religious institutions alone.

Among urban Christian youth and college-going respondents, tarot reading, zodiac-based personality analysis, angel numbers, and online horoscope content emerged more as forms of emotional guidance and self-reflection than strict religious practice. Social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube were frequently mentioned as important spaces where spirituality and emotional support are accessed.

**One university student remarked:**

“Even if we don’t completely believe in astrology, zodiac posts often feel relatable. They help us understand emotions and relationships.”

This finding reveals how astrology increasingly functions as a form of digital emotional culture among younger generations. Astrology-based content creates symbolic online communities where individuals negotiate loneliness, stress, identity, and interpersonal relationships.



Gender emerged as another important dimension of the study. Women respondents were more likely to consult astrologers regarding marriage, fertility, family welfare, emotional crises, and domestic harmony. In many households, women also played a central role in maintaining ritual practices related to astrology and spiritual protection.

At the same time, the research identified the growing participation of women as astrologers, tarot readers, spiritual entrepreneurs, and digital influencers. Several women respondents described astrology and tarot reading as spaces of emotional expression, financial independence, and social recognition.

One female tarot reader from Kolkata observed:

“Many women come because they feel emotionally unheard. Sometimes they need emotional support more than prediction.”

This highlights the therapeutic dimensions of contemporary spirituality. Astrology and tarot often function as informal counselling spaces where women negotiate anxiety, relationships, emotional isolation, and social pressure.

The study also explored indigenous knowledge traditions, particularly Khanar Bachan, which continues to occupy an important place within Bengali cultural memory. Respondents associated Khana with ecological wisdom, agricultural observation, climate knowledge, and women’s intellectual contribution within Bengali history.

An elderly farmer from South 24 Parganas explained:

“Our elders followed Khana’s sayings because they believed nature gives signs.”

This finding demonstrates that indigenous predictive systems continue to survive through oral tradition and intergenerational cultural transmission. Khanar Bachan therefore represents not only agricultural wisdom but also a symbolic recognition of women’s intellectual presence within Bengali society.

One of the most significant findings of the study was the expansion of Astro-AI and digital spirituality. Younger respondents frequently relied on astrology applications, AI-generated horoscopes, numerology platforms, and social media astrology pages because they were accessible, immediate, and easy to use.

A university student remarked:



“I regularly use astrology apps, but for important family decisions we still consult traditional astrologers.”

This demonstrates that digital predictive systems coexist with traditional practices rather than completely replacing them. AI-driven astrology platforms increasingly provide compatibility analysis, personalized horoscopes, emotional advice, and daily predictions targeted particularly toward urban youth audiences.

However, traditional astrologers often expressed skepticism toward AI-generated predictions. Many argued that machines cannot understand human emotions, suffering, destiny, or spiritual complexity.

One traditional astrologer commented:

“Software can calculate planets, but it cannot understand human emotions or destiny.”

This tension reflects broader sociological debates regarding authenticity, technological mediation, and cultural authority in contemporary society. While Astro-AI expands accessibility and popularity, traditional astrologers continue to claim legitimacy through intuition, experience, and inherited knowledge.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that astrology in contemporary Bengal cannot be understood merely as superstition or irrational belief. Instead, it functions as a dynamic socio-cultural institution connected with emotional well-being, consumer culture, digital technology, gender relations, indigenous knowledge, and identity formation.

## **Discussion**

The findings of the study suggest that astrology in contemporary West Bengal cannot simply be dismissed as superstition or irrational belief. Rather, astrology functions as a socially embedded cultural system through which people negotiate uncertainty, emotional insecurity, social transitions, and identity formation within rapidly changing modern societies. The continuing relevance of astrology across educational, class, and religious backgrounds indicates that predictive belief systems still possess symbolic legitimacy and emotional significance even within technologically advanced environments.

From a sociological perspective, the findings support Durkheim’s argument that collective beliefs survive because they fulfill important emotional and social functions. Astrology operates not only as an individual belief but also as a socially institutionalized practice reinforced through family traditions, marriage customs, ritual behaviour, media circulation, and everyday interaction. Practices such as



horoscope matching before marriage, ritual timing for ceremonies, and consultation before business ventures continue because they are socially normalized and culturally accepted.

Even among educated urban respondents, astrology was often described as a source of reassurance, confidence, and emotional comfort during periods of uncertainty. In this sense, astrology becomes less about “blind belief” and more about symbolic coping and emotional stability within a competitive and uncertain social environment.

The study further demonstrates that modernity has not eliminated predictive knowledge systems; instead, it has transformed them through digital technology, social media culture, and consumer practices. Astrology applications, online consultations, YouTube astrologers, Instagram spiritual influencers, and AI-generated horoscope systems represent new technological forms through which traditional cosmological systems are circulated and consumed.

This reflects the coexistence of tradition and modernity rather than a simple conflict between science and belief. Digital platforms have increased the accessibility, personalization, and commercialization of astrology, especially among younger generations who engage with zodiac culture, tarot reading, and online spirituality as part of everyday digital life.

The emergence of Astro-AI is particularly significant within this context. AI-driven astrology systems increasingly provide automated horoscope generation, compatibility analysis, emotional guidance, and personalized predictions. However, the findings reveal an important tension between technological efficiency and traditional spiritual authority. Younger respondents often appreciated the convenience and immediacy of astrology applications, while traditional astrologers questioned whether machines could truly understand human emotions, suffering, karma, and destiny.

This tension reflects broader sociological concerns regarding authenticity, technological mediation, and the changing nature of expertise in contemporary society. While digital astrology expands accessibility and popularizes predictive systems, traditional astrologers continue to claim symbolic legitimacy through intuition, spiritual experience, and inherited knowledge traditions.

Consumer culture also emerged as a major dimension of contemporary astrology. Jewellery-store consultations, gemstone marketing, paid online predictions, and spiritual counselling services demonstrate how astrology increasingly operates within commercial and therapeutic economies. Gemstones, rituals, and spiritual remedies are often marketed not simply as religious objects but as lifestyle commodities associated with healing, positivity, self-care, and emotional well-being.



The study additionally reveals the strong relationship between astrology and gender. Women respondents were more likely to engage with astrology regarding marriage compatibility, fertility, domestic harmony, children's future, and emotional crises. This reflects the gendered expectations placed upon women within family structures, where women often carry emotional and relational responsibilities.

At the same time, the increasing visibility of women astrologers, tarot readers, spiritual entrepreneurs, and digital influencers suggests changing forms of women's agency within spiritual spaces. Astrology and tarot often function as alternative emotional spaces where women seek expression, guidance, support, and symbolic empowerment.

Religion within the study appeared not as a rigid boundary but as a flexible cultural framework. Hindu respondents openly practiced astrology through ritual and cosmological traditions, while Muslim respondents often negotiated predictive practices through numerology, ta'wiz, and folk spiritual practices. Christian youth respondents engaged more with zodiac symbolism, tarot reading, and online spirituality as forms of self-reflection and emotional guidance. These findings suggest that predictive systems frequently move beyond strict doctrinal boundaries and become integrated into broader cultural practices of meaning-making and emotional reassurance.

The study also highlights the continuing relevance of indigenous knowledge traditions such as Khanar Bachan. Respondents associated Khana with ecological wisdom, climate observation, agricultural knowledge, and women's intellectual contribution within Bengali history. The survival of these sayings through oral tradition demonstrates the resilience of local epistemologies despite increasing technological modernization.

This is particularly important sociologically because it challenges the dominance of purely Western scientific frameworks by recognizing indigenous and experiential forms of knowledge. Khanar Bachan therefore represents not only folk wisdom but also an important cultural memory connected with ecology, gender, and vernacular knowledge systems.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that astrology in contemporary Bengal functions as a symbolic coping mechanism during periods of social instability, emotional stress, economic uncertainty, and rapid cultural transformation. In a society shaped by competitive education systems, employment insecurity, relationship anxieties, and digital isolation, astrology provides individuals with narratives of hope, order, predictability, and reassurance.



Overall, the study demonstrates that astrology in contemporary West Bengal is not a static remnant of the past but a dynamic socio-cultural institution continuously adapting to modernity, technology, consumer culture, and changing social relationships. The coexistence of traditional astrology, indigenous knowledge systems, digital spirituality, and AI-mediated prediction reveals the complex ways in which belief systems continue to evolve while remaining deeply connected to everyday social life.

## Conclusion

The present study argues that astrology and related forms of divination continue to function as significant cultural resources within contemporary West Bengal. Rather than disappearing under modernization, these practices are being reshaped through digital technologies, social media, consumer culture, and emerging forms of Astro-AI.

By examining astrology, tarot reading, gemstone consultation, Vastu Shastra, Khanar Bachan, and digital spirituality within a unified sociological framework, the paper demonstrates that predictive knowledge systems remain deeply embedded within everyday life. These systems function as mechanisms for uncertainty management, emotional reassurance, cultural continuity, symbolic authority, and identity construction.

The coexistence of traditional cosmological systems and digital prediction technologies reveals that modernity does not necessarily eliminate systems of belief. Instead, modernity often transforms and recontextualizes them within changing technological and social environments.

The study further highlights that astrology in contemporary Bengal functions not only as a spiritual or ritual practice but also as a form of emotional communication and social negotiation. In a rapidly changing society marked by economic uncertainty, emotional stress, competitive lifestyles, and digital dependency, predictive systems provide individuals with symbolic stability and interpretive frameworks through which they make sense of relationships, careers, family expectations, and future anxieties.

At the same time, the research emphasizes the importance of recognizing indigenous and vernacular knowledge traditions such as Khanar Bachan within broader discussions of Indian Knowledge Systems and cultural sociology. The survival of these traditions demonstrates the resilience of local epistemologies despite globalization and technological transformation.

Future research may further explore the intersections between Astro-AI, digital spirituality, gendered emotional labour, media culture, and indigenous knowledge practices across different communities and



regions of India. Such studies would contribute significantly to understanding how belief, technology, culture, and everyday life continue to interact within contemporary society.

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