

Vedic Astrology and the Use of the Sidereal and Tropical Zodiacs

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In his opening verses of the discourse on Hora (astrology), the great sage Parasara (Brhat Parasara Hora Shastra 3:3-5) says that the zodiac consists of 27 Nakshatras starting from Ashwini and these are fixed, i.e. sidereal. That same space is also divided into 12 signs starting from Aries. Thus, in the most unambiguous words, Parasara has made it clear that Jyotish follows the Sidereal Zodiac and the 12-fold division of the signs is laid on top of the 27 Nakshatras and is thus, without question Sidereal. The great sage Garga gives an essentially identical statement. This is discussed in more detail below along with many other considerations which clearly point to the same conclusion.

An Idiosyncratic Approach to Vedic Astrology (Jyotish)

A few astrologers have recently started espousing the novel concept that the nakshatras are sidereal and the rashis tropical. They are therefore promoting the idea that these should be used simultaneously in the astrological chart. This is partly based on an interpretation of the Surya Siddhanta that computes sidereal positions for the grahas and then converts them to tropical for certain calculations like eclipses. However, the Surya Siddhanta has been in wide use for centuries but has never before been interpreted in this way by Jyotishis.

To traditional Jyotish, this mash-up of sidereal nakshatras with tropical rashis is entirely bizarre. This is because the whole system of Jyotish emerges out of the union of the nakshatra (lunar) and rashi (solar view). Therefore, this concept breaks the entire rationale for Jyotish. In the following, I will give just a few of the many instances where this is obviously true.

Life born of the Union of the Mother and the Father – the Basis of Jyotish

Humanity has always looked at the skies and in the days before electricity, humans had a lot of time to view, think and study what they saw. Certain things were obvious. Firstly, there are 12 full moons in a year. Consequently, there is a 12 month calendar and the path of the Sun (the zodiac) is divided into 12. In fact, there are nearly $12\frac{1}{2}$ such months in the year [1] so the Vedic calendar adds an extra month about every 32.5 months. This computation is based on the Sun's passage through the 12 sidereal signs. Thus, the traditional Vedic Calendar still in use by Jyotishis and others today, relies on the use of sidereal signs.

This 12-sign zodiac is considered to be lorded by the Sun because it is based on its annual passage. The ancients also observed that the Moon was seen every night in a different group of stars and took about 27 days to complete one passage of the zodiac. They therefore divided the path of the Moon into 27 'Lunar Mansions' or nakshatras and, naturally, considered this to be lorded by the Moon. Equally naturally, they associated the Sun with the father and the Moon with the mother. Thus, the next step for them was to combine the lunar and solar schemes to understand life as it arises from the union of the mother and the father.

In order to unite 12 with 27, there had to be a number which unifies them. The smallest such number is 108.

$$12 \times 9 = 27 \times 4 = 108.$$

The Aims of Life (Purusha Arthas)

From Vedic times, the day had been seen as divided into four parts by sunrise, midday, sunset and midnight. Since each day was associated with a nakshatra, so each nakshatra was divided into four. In the Vedic scheme, the day begins with sunrise and they used the early hours of the day for Vedic studies and activities that required clear consciousness such as giving Jyotish and Ayurveda consultations. Thus the first part of the day came to be associated with Dharma, doing one's duty especially educating oneself and the youth. After that was the time for seeing to one's business and so the second quarter was assigned to Artha, the pursuit of wealth and material resources. After sunset was the time for socialization and reproduction, which they termed Kama, and midnight to sunrise, especially the hours before sunrise, was and are the best time for meditation so this period was associated with Moksha, the pursuit of liberation. In other words, the sequence of the Purusha Arthas – Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha – arose naturally from the energies of the divisions of the day.

Because of this fourfold division and its association with the aims of life, this sequence was applied to every nakshatra. Each one was given four quarters or padas, which follow the sequence of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. At some point, in a very natural way, these four were associated with their most appropriate element giving the sequence, fire, earth, air and water. I am explaining this to show that a simple logic can be applied to explain the assignment of the aims to the padas of the Nakshatras. There may be other explanations for this but everything should come down to how life is on Earth for humanity. For Jyotish to apply to human life, it must be based on the natural sequence of things that we experience or at least how the Vedic people saw it.

Since $27 \times 4 = 108$ it was natural to see how the signs of the Sun could also be associated with this number and this followed effortlessly by dividing each sign into nine parts. If these ninefold divisions, called navamshas, are identified with the padas of the nakshatras, the father and the mother meet and the world arises and so did the system of Jyotish as we discuss in the following paragraphs.

The Fourth and Ninth Houses

From this core equation, the sages assigned four as the number of the mother and nine as that of the father and applied this to the chart. This meant the fourth house was the place of the mother and our protectors while the ninth was that of the father and our teachers. One mixed zodiac astrologer claimed to me that the tenth house, not the ninth, was the place of the father. However, if one looks at the chapters in Brhat Parashara Hora Shastra, the oldest extant and core text of Jyotish, on the ninth and tenth houses, the ninth house chapter has numerous references to father while there is no such reference in the tenth house chapter. After all, our relationship with our father has little to do with our mother's view of her husband, which might be seen

reference in the tenth house chapter. After all, our relationship with our father has little to do with our mother's view of her husband, which might be seen in the place opposite the fourth.

How the Signs (Rashis) are Associated with the Aims of Life and the Elements

At some stage the starting point of the zodiac had to be decided. For many lineages this was based on the brightest star close to the zodiac, the star Spica called by the Vedic people Chitra, which means the beautiful image. Such a beauty could only have been associated with the Goddess, Shakti, so Her Lord Shiva must be exactly opposite this. Hence the zodiac was started from the opposite point, which, of necessity, had no star as Shiva is the formless absolute. In the Surya Siddhanta and other ancient Jyotish texts, it is considered that Rahu was at zero degrees of the zodiac at the start of the great periods of time. Ketu was thus associated with Chitra. In the mantras for Rahu, it states that Rahu was born in Aries (Mesha) and Ashwini, the first nakshatra of the zodiac, thus fixing Ashwini in Aries. Frequent reference to Chitra is made in the mantras of Ketu.

Since the union discussed above is the key to the whole system, the nakshatras and rashis (signs) begin together as the Rahu mantras suggest. That means both start with the first pada of Ashwini in Aries. Mesha (Aries) ends nine navamshas/padas later. Then Vrshabha (Taurus) starts with the second pada of Krittika ending in the second pada of Mrigashira. Thus, Aries starts, ends and has in its centre a Dharma/fire pada. This is why Aries is defined as a fire sign as also a Dharma sign.

If one continues following how the nakshatras cover the rashis (signs), one finds that Taurus is Artha/Earth, Gemini is Kama/Air and Cancer is Moksha/Water. At the end of Cancer, where water ends and fire begins, both the rashi (and its vargas) and the nakshatra end, creating a complete void. These water/fire transitions are called gandantas and are naturally considered dangerous because of the void. Those who reject the integration of the signs and the nakshatras will have to give up gandanta as well as the assignments of the aims and elements to the rashis. There is much more that could be said about how the interpretations of the Rashis and Bhavas are derived from their Nakshatras.

It is important to be clear that the vargas (divisions) are not a separate consideration as they belong to the rashi and all vargas end at the end of every rashi. That means the gap at the end of each rashi is the same from the point of view of the rashis and the vargas! The water/fire sign transition is only distinct from the other rashi transitions because that is where there is no Nakshatra bridging the change of signs. That is why there are only three gandantas, not 12, in traditional Jyotish.

The Exaltation Positions of the Grahas

Maharishi Parashara defines the exaltation and debilitation points of the planets by mentioning a degree within a rashi. This degree falls in a nakshatra. If the nakshatras are integrated with the rashis, as they have always been considered to be, we find the exaltation degrees make a lot of sense. If not, then the nakshatra is unknown and all that is lost. For example, one can ask questions like 'Is Jupiter exalted in Pushya?' Pushya is the place of the Sapta Rishis, the seven great gurus of mankind, and Brihaspati (Jupiter) is the devata of the nakshatra. If the rashis are tropical and the nakshatras are sidereal then Pushya is already moving into tropical Leo. The people promoting the novel astrology will have to answer whether Jupiter will be exalted in Leo and debilitated in Aquarius or has he ceased to reach his peak in his own favourite nakshatra?

Is Saturn debilitated in Bharani? The Purnanas describe the humiliation of Shani (Saturn) in the story of how his father favoured his half-brother Yama, lord of Bharani, over him. That is why Yama is worshipped to overcome the negatives of Saturn. If Bharani goes to Taurus, is Shani now debilitated in Taurus and exalted in Scorpio? If so, given the critical nature of the exaltation and debilitation lords, the nature of society would change drastically. Similarly, we could analyze the other planets and find similar conundrums.

The Avatars of Vishnu

It is a critical concept in traditional Jyotish that all the Vishnu Avatars are born with the Moon in the Lagna (Ascendant). This means they have come to serve and care for mankind and all beings. It is interesting to note that there are four Purna Avatars, Shri Krishna, Shri Rama, Shri Nrsimha and Shri Varaha and there are just four rashis where the Moon is fully auspicious. These signs are led by Taurus because this is the place of Exaltation of the Moon and astrologers have always placed Lord Krishna's Moon in the Ascendant in Taurus. Lord Krishna is said in the Vaishnava literature to be the highest Avatar, the only one with all 16 kalas, like the Moon when it is perfectly full.

What evidence do we have for Shri Krishna's Moon being in Rohini and Taurus? In the Shrimad Bhagawatam 10.3.1 it states that Lord Krishna was born with Rohini [2] rising. All the eminent translators have translated this to say that Rohini was in the Ascendant but the Sanskrit also means that the Moon was in Rohini. The Vaishnava literature is replete with references to the opulences of the Lord and only Rohini would do justice to such a term. Vedic Astrologers, of course, assume that Rohini is central to Taurus but is there any evidence for that? In Brihat Parashara Hora Shastra when discussing the Para Vidya Siddhamsha chart, which pertains to supreme knowledge, Maharishi Parashara, the author of the Vishnu Purana, assigns Govinda to Taurus as the devata (deity). With such a clear indication, it is no wonder that Taurus is taken as Shri Krishna's Ascendant and Moon sign. In Vishnu Purana (5.1.77) Maharishi Parashara quotes Lord Vishnu predicting his birth as occurring on Nabhas Krishna Ashtami. That is the eighth day of the dark half of the lunar month of Shravana that coincides with July/August. This puts his sidereal Sun in Leo and the Moon in Taurus. In the mixed zodiac astrology Taurus is disconnected from Rohini. At the time of Shri Krishna's advent his degree of Rohini was in tropical Pisces and his Sun was in tropical Gemini in the last degree. How does that explain his regal nature and immovable strength? The whole beautiful chart that so perfectly explains the details of Shri Krishna's life is lost.

In the case of Shri Rama, there is no room for doubt as Valmiki's Ramayana clearly states that the Moon was in Punarvasu in the Cancer Ascendant with Jupiter (Canto XVIII, verse 9). This means that Punarvasu overlaps with Cancer as in the sidereal zodiac, which leaves almost no scope for the drifting rashi theory.

The Vimshottari Dasha

Consider the Vimshottari dasha, considered by many as the crest-jewel of Vedic Astrology. As anyone who has studied this knows, especially if they have read the last chapter of the book Yoga of the Planets, the whole basis of the interpretation of Vimshottari is grounded in the identity of the navamsha and

the nakshatra pada.

We have shown above how the elements can be assigned to the rashis by the nakshatras. At the end of nine Nakshatras, the set of elements as expressed in the rashis is complete and there is a gandanta. This then naturally defines nine Nakshatras as a cycle. There is no such logic for this cycle in the mixed zodiac view.

This set of nine can then be associated with the nine planets and is used for the Vimshottari dasha. This makes the Vimshottari dasha especially general in application. There is no gandanta during the nine Nakshatra cycle because the nakshatras continue when the rashi changes. The rashi changes break the nakshatras in key places and these breaks are the core of understanding the dasha.

There are three breaks, each occurring between different padas. Therefore, these three Nakshatras, which are expressed as three particular dashas in a life, are associated with different transitions. For example, the first transition between, for example, Aries and Taurus is between dharma (Krittika, 1st pada) and artha (Krittika 2nd pada). Dharma here means learning how to be in the world while artha means taking up the responsibilities of living and, in most cases, being a householder. Almost everyone faces this transition during the third dasha of their life, which relates to the break in the Surya (Sun) nakshatra (the third in the cycle), which bridges the change from a fire sign to an earth sign. After some time in the ardent pursuit of wealth and family responsibility, the next transition comes associated with the fifth dasha and the break between earth and air signs bridged by a Mars nakshatra. And so forth. This is very deep and powerful view and there is a great deal to explain and you can find much more in the book Yoga of the Planets and my recorded workshops especially the one from April 23rd in London (BAVA.org).

Yoga Taras

Traditionally, the nakshatras are associated with certain key stars which are called Yoga Taras. If the nakshatras are taken as of unequal size, then these stars mark the boundaries. However, when the sages chose to equalize the lengths of the nakshatras, these stars remained important for the meaning of the Nakshatra and that meaning translates to their rashi. For example, Punarvasu is associated with the two stars Pollux and Castor that are so bright and obvious in the night sky. The more advanced (Pollux) is the boundary star but the plural in the name Punarvasu and the visibly obvious twinning of the stars led to Gemini being the sign of the twins.

Regulus is the Yoga Tara of Magha, the throne of the king. How can one imagine that Leo is not associated with Regulus and the other stars that make the image of a lion in the sky? All the signs and their symbols are based on the pattern of stars in that sector of the sky and the interpretation of the sign has much to do with the symbol and hence the stars [3]. If Magha drifts out of Leo then where is the king's throne? If Magha is not in Leo, how is it the royal sign? Merely saying it is ruled by the Sun is insufficient as without the throne, one cannot call oneself the king.

It is strange that tropical astrology uses the names 'Aries', 'Taurus', etc. for the signs because its signs are just the seasonal months starting from the beginning of Spring. They have nothing whatsoever to do with the signs of the astronomical zodiac. Had proper names been assigned to these tropical 'signs' then great confusion would have been avoided. However, it is as it is. At least we should understand that Vedic Astrology emerged naturally from observation of the sky and the nature of life. The integration of the lunar and the solar, the nakshatras and the rashis, the female and the male have given us the beauty of a perfect system for mirroring life.

Does the Tropical Zodiac have a Role in Vedic Astrology?

In Jyotish, we use the Sidereal Zodiac for birth charts and, sometimes, the Tropical Zodiac for matters pertaining to the weather. The Tropical Zodiac starts from the Vernal Equinox which defines the beginning of Spring. In this way the Tropical Zodiac is all about the seasons and the seasons are the principal determinant of the weather as the driver of weather is the Sun's energy entering the geosphere. Both zodiacs are entirely valid and the precession of the Vernal equinox, which defines the difference, has a key role in the destiny of mankind. In the Editorial to Gochara for Spring 2018, the BAVA journal, I show how the movement of the Vernal Equinox point over the key degrees for the planets has had remarkable effects on mankind.

In the Spring 2016 edition of Gochara, I showed how the interpretations of the rashis that are related to the weather must logically have arisen in North India. Because some concepts about the rashis may be related to seasonal factors, some people seize on this to say that the rashis are therefore tropical. They then insist that the nakshatras are inherently sidereal. This misses several key points. Firstly, the nakshatra interpretations can also be related to the process of planting, reaping, storing and consuming grain. For example, Shatabhishaj can be associated with the time when the grain was traditionally wrapped in herbs and stored so it may become medicinal. Professor Subrahmanyam, who lectured at the British Association of Vedic Astrology (BAVA.org) several years ago, explained this cycle nakshatra by nakshatra. Therefore, both nakshatras and rashis have a seasonal interpretation and they both also have a more fixed sidereal one. There are well established circumstances and systems of astrology that use either the Sidereal or the Tropical Zodiac.

Astronomy and Astrology as Distinct Disciplines and the Arguments of the Mixed Zodiac Proponents

If one considers the challenge of measuring the position of the Sun, the Moon and the planets (Astronomy) and constructing a chart for Astrological purposes one is faced with a challenge. The Sun can only be observed by day when the other lights and especially the stars are not visible. It is therefore inevitable that the Solar position will be measured from some key seasonal point such as the Vernal Equinox. Thus, for the Sun, the position is Tropical. The Moon and the planets are naturally observed at night and can be defined with respect to the stars and constellations they are transiting. These are Sidereal positions. Thus, Astronomy gives such positions but then they have to be combined and this requires converting the Sidereal to Tropical or vice versa. This is done for the sake of Astrology.

Arguments raised for the use of the Tropical Zodiac mainly consist of reference to texts which appear to describe the Sun from a Tropical point of view. For example, Surya Siddhanta 14:7 and the Srimad Bhagavatam 5:21:3. As explained in the previous paragraph, the Sun is naturally measured Tropically so these texts are simply following nature. They do not make any argument about the application to Astrological charts. On the other hand, the great seer of Astrology, Maharishi Parasara, settles the subject in the Third Chapter of Brhat Parasara Hora Sastra. In verse 3 he explains that the Nakshatras are fixed 'Sthira'. Then, he says

भचक्रस्य नगाश्व्यंशा अश्विन्यादि समाह्वयाः॥4॥

नन्दनः॥ निभागात् नन्वा येनतिम् नन्वाः।

भचक्रस्य नगदश्व्यामसा अश्विन्यादि समहवयाह॥४॥

bhacakrasya nagāśvyaṁsā aśvinyādi samāhvayaḥ॥4॥
taddvādaśa vibhāgāstu tulyā meśādisamjñakāḥ]

In verse 4, he says there are 27 Nakshatras starting from Ashwini in the 'Bhacakra' (Zodiac). Here is the word by word translation, Sanskrit word followed by translation in bold:

bhacakra **zodiac** nagāśvyaṁsā **27** aśvinyādi **Ashwini and the others** samāhvayaḥ **named as (Ashwini, etc.)**

In Verse 5, he says 'Tat', meaning this Nakshatra mandala just described is divided into 12 equal parts ('Dvadasha vibhaga tulya') starting from 'Mesha' (Aries). Here is the word by word translation:

tad **that just referred to, the zodiac defined by the Nakshatras** dvādaśa **12** vibhāgāstu **is divided** tulyā **equally** meśādi **Aries and others** samjñakāḥ **known as (Aries, etc.)**

Thus, unambiguously, Maharishi Parasara has stated that the Bhacakra (Zodiac) is fixed (Sthira = Sidereal) and that it starts from Ashwini as also the sign Mesha/Aries and that the signs are of equal length. Thus, he sets the stage for Astrology, which is the topic for his book.

Sage Garga, a contemporary of Parasara was a pre-eminent Jyotishi. So great was he that Jyotishis after him were referred to as followers of Garga. He also gave the names to **Shri Krishna** and his brother Shri Balarama. Much of his work has been lost but he is cited in the 16th Century text **Hora Ratnam** (1.7) as follows:

भचक्रे मेषादिव्यवस्थामाह गर्गः – The Bhacakra (Zodiac) of Aries and following signs are fixed or determined as is said (commanded) by Garga (in the following)

अश्विनी भरणी मेषः कृत्तिका पादमेव च। – Aries starts with Ashwini Nakshatra, then Bharani and then one quarter of Krittika

तत्पादत्रितयम् केशः वृषः सौम्यदलं तथा॥ – (Krittika) continues with three quarters in Taurus followed by Rohini (Kasha) and half of Mrigashira (Saumya)

and so he continues to describe how the rashis are overlaid exactly over the Nakshatras in precisely the same way as described by Parasara except that Garga spells it out for every Nakshatra and Rashi (sign). Hora Ratnam is of especial importance because he states for almost every verse, which authority he is quoting, taking no credit for himself. Thus, it is certain that he quotes Garga in good faith.

Conclusion

The key elements of Jyotish are founded upon using both rashis (signs) and nakshatras in the Sidereal Zodiac. The unorthodox approach by a small handful of Western astrologers who suggest using tropical signs and sidereal nakshatras ignores many crucial cornerstones of Jyotish, including the places of exaltation and debilitation by sign and nakshatra, the placement of the Yoga Taras by sign, the principle of gandanta (the end/beginning zone of both the Rashis and Nakshatras), the perfect correspondence between the nakshatras and the navamshas, the four Aims of Life and their relationship to the rashis and nakshatra padas and the birth of the Vishnu Avatars in the auspicious rashis and nakshatras of the Moon. Finally, we have seen how Maharishi Parasara defines a Sidereal Zodiac which starts from Ashwini and Aries.

[1] 12.37

[2] Referred to as Ajana – Prajapati, Brahma, the deity of Rohini

[3] For example, President Donald Trump's chart has the ascendant, Mars and Regulus in the same Nakshatra pada