

Nakshatra Summit

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I. Measuring Sidereal Time and Space w/ Nakshatras in the Vedanga Jyotisha

The ancient Indians possessed a mastery and understanding of space and time that exceeded their neighbors – at least as it relates organizing the calendar and zodiac. The calendar measures the earth going around the Sun. The Zodiac measures objects circling the earth and moving through space.

We see in the earliest Vedic astrological references, how timekeeping was approached, how the zodiac was calculated and how it was used to measure time and space.

Solar months were connected to the seasons and solstices but MEASURED by the Nakshatras, both in space and time. Below are a few of the important sections from the Vedanga Jyotisha in the Krishna Yajur Veda that show how the Indians measured space and time with Nakshatras.

A. The year length and the connection of the seasons to the solstices are seen.

“366 days for the solar year. In the year there are six ritus (seasons) and two ayanas (solstices). In the year there are twelve solar months. Five years make a yuga.”

* Note - See section A of “Additional Material” Below for more info on the seasons in the Yajur Veda

B. The following verses show that the new moon in Dhanishta (Shravishta) Nakshatra began the soli / lunar month of Magha, at that time. It also shows the solar / calendar month (Tapa) and the year / yuga beginning on the new moon near the winter solstice.

“When the Sun and Moon occupy the same region of the zodiac together with the asterism Shravishta, at that time begins the yuga, and the (synodic) month of Magha, the (solar seasonal) month called Tapas, the bright fortnight (of the Synodic month Magha) and their northward course (uttarayan / winter solstice).”

* Note it seems they celebrated the Northern course on the New Moon near the Solstice

C. Below we see the Nakshatras measuring both the northern and the southern course, at the time of this text.

“When situated at the beginning of the Shravishta segment, the Sun and Moon begin to move north. When they reach the midpoint of the Aslesha segment, they begin moving south.

* They seem to be connecting the Sun and moon to start / celebrate the Northern course, when only the Sun creates the northern course – but the soli/lunar months began the year, months and seasons.

D. And this, which confirms that six seasons multiplied by 4.5 Asterisms (Nakshatras) = 27 Nakshatras: -- *Four and a half asterismal segments is one ritu (season).”*

E. And this, five-year yugas measured by Nakshatras transited by the Sun in five years:

“In the same way the total of the asterisms of the Sun (which comes round five times) is 135.”

It is clear that in the Vedas, approximately 1500 - 1200 BC, the Indians connected the seasons to the solstices (and the new moon of that month) and also began the year / yuga at that time. They also measured everything with sidereal space and time. The Sun moving through Nakshtras measured the time (seasons, year and 5 year yuga).

It makes a strong case for the Nakshtras to be 27 equal portions of space, not “uneven Nakshatra / stellar portions” or “connected to the Taras (stars)”. This is the Nirayana zodiac (without solstice). They also had the Sayana zodiac (with solstice) zodiac for the calendar factors. I believe this is also the most plausible reason why generally Abhijit is not included in the 27 nakshatra schema.

Also, even though no “zodiac signs” were mentioned in the Vedas, we must conclude (unless compelling evidence suggests otherwise) that the Indians would continue to measure the sky surrounding the Earth with the Nirayana zodiac—and indeed they did as we see in all the major Vedic astrology texts. Of course, they also continued to measure the calendar with the Sayana zodiac.

*Note – see Additional Material section B – for the exact quotes from all of the major Vedic astrology texts on Sidereal Zodiac.

II. Nakshatra Schema and the Zodiac Triplicities

A Few Things First:

1. Nakshatra Deities are from the Vedas not the Puranas (the more approachable secular deities)
2. Many refer to Adityas, sons of the earth mother (Aditi) – Protective, creative nature of Sun.
3. They show a cosmic, divine temperament – according to the Deity’s nature. (Divine harsh or gentle actions are shown)

Different Classes of Nakshatra Deities

Vedic Gods:

Soma, Indra, Ashwins, Yama, Prajapati, Brhaspati, Nirriti, Rudra, Aditi, Vishnu, IndrAgni

Adityas: (Sons of Aditi – Ruler of Punarvasu)

Bhaga, Aryaman, Savitur, Vishwa Karma, Mitra, Pushan, Varuna.

Elemental Gods:

Agni, Apas, Vayu,

Others:

The Viswa Devas, 8 Vasus, Ahi Bhudnya, Aja Ekapad, Sarpa, Pitris

First Triplicity of Zodiac: Aries-Cancer

Initiating creation as there are two Cardinal Signs at the beginning and end.

No Adityas. But Aditi is introduced, after Lord Rudra brings down Prajapati.

Second Triplexity of Zodiac: Leo-Scorpio

Have to do with maintaining creation as there are two fixed signs at the beginning and end.
Five Adityas to Protect and Sustain the Earth.

Third Triplexity of Zodiac: Sagittarius-Pisces

Have to do with transformation as there are two Mutable Signs at the beginning and end.
Many Supernatural, Unusual Deities that combine transformative forces, elements and energies.

Additional Material

A. Seasons, Solstices and Zodiac in the Vedas

In the Vedas, the Indian calendar correctly measured the seasons and aligned them with the solstices and measured them with the sidereal zodiac.

The year had twelve Saura / Solar months, connected the solstices and seasons, and measured using the zodiac of sidereal space and time.

The Vedas have several sections that describe the ancient approach to Indian timekeeping, the year, seasons, etc.

In the Yajur Veda (1200 BC) - Book 4, V. 4, stanza 11 states:
(Ye are) Madha and Madhava, the months of spring. (Vasanta)
(Ye are) Çukra and Çuci, the months of summer. (Greeshma)
(Ye are) Nabha and Nabhasya, the months of rain. (Varsha)
(Ye are) Isa and Urja, the months of autumn. (Sharad)
(Ye are) Saha and Sahasya, the months of winter. (Hemanta)
(Ye are) Tapa and Tapasya, the months of the cool season. (Shishira)

These twelve portions / months of the year were pinned to the Earth / Sun (Saura year), like the twelve months of the calendar. These twelve seasonal months are akin to the Gregorian calendar months of January, February, etc.

But in India, every third month began a new season and was coordinated with a solstice or equinox. The entire cycle began on the new moon in the month of the winter solstice (it seems).

But the year also had twelve soli / lunar synodic months that marked the full and new moons. Those months had the same names in the Vedas that they have now in modern India (Maagha, Phalgun, Chaitra, etc.). We see important celebrations and daily life connected to this soli / lunar calendar. These cycles are astrological, not seasonal in nature.

Those 30° portions were not connected to the solstices and seasons directly, only loosely.

Instead, they were connected to / measured by the astrological / sidereal / Nakshatra based zodiac—then AND now.

B. Sidereal Zodiac in 6 Major Astrology and Astronomy Texts

Below are the quotes from 5 of the most important Vedic astrology texts and also from the Surya Siddhanta, the most important astronomical treatise in India.

Brihat Parashara Hora Sastra – Sage Parashara (Exact age unknown)

Ch. 3, V. 4-6:

Those are called “Grahas,” that move through the Nakshatras (or stellar mansions) in the zodiac. The said zodiac comprises of 27 Nakshatras commencing from Ashvini. The same area is divided in twelve parts equal to twelve “Rashis” commencing from Mesh.

BPHS also indicates that planets move through 27 Nakshatras and the same area is divided into 12 portions beginning with Aries.

Also, in BPHS there is an explicit rule to add the ayanamsha portion (to “the zodiac”) when calculating Ayana bala.

Brihat Parashara Hora Sastra—Ch 17, V. 15

Add Ayanāñś to the Grah and find out the Bhuja (distance from the nearest equinox),...

Ayana bala is purely a tropical consideration, declaring that planets are stronger based on their proximity to the nearest solstice point. We see in this passage, the directive to *add the ayanamsha to the zodiac* to determine which Ayana is present. Meaning, the zodiac is sidereal, so to find the ayana we need to add the ayanamsha to the (sidereal) zodiac. Brihat Parashara Hora Sastra is definitely a sidereal zodiac text. All of the methods in that book are meant to be applied to the Nirayana / sidereal sky.

But there are other explicit statements in Vedic astrology texts defining the zodiac sidereally.

Brihat Jataka – Varahamihira (5-6th Century) Ch. 1, V. 4:

“In the celestial Chakra (globe) the signs commencing with Mesha and Aswini, are each formed by nine padams (quarters) of stars and govern the following organs of Kalapurusha...”

Hora Sara - Prithuyasas - Son of Varahamihira (Approx. 7th Century) Ch.1 V.14

“Two and a quarter of stars make one Rasi. Each of the 12 signs is constituted by two and a quarter of stars or nine padas with Ashwini in the start in Aries and Revati at the end in Pisces.”

Jataka Parijata - Vaidyanatha Dikshita (1463 CE) Ch1. Sloka 7

“Kriya (Aries) and other zodiacal signs in the heavens consist of nine quarters of stars reckoning from Ashwini,..”

Yavana Jataka—Sphujidhvaja (2-4th Century) Ch. 79, V. 30:

“By terrible feats of asceticism the two Asvins learned this science from Prajapati, and the Sun learned it from them; hence the Creator placed the pair of horses (Asvini) at the beginning of his head in the circle of signs which is the body of Kala.”^

Surya Siddhanta, Ch. 1 – Mean Motions of Planets

25-28. The planets moving westward with exceeding velocity, but constantly beaten by the asterisms, fall behind, at a rate precisely equal, proceeding each in its- own path. Hence they have an eastward motion. From the number of their revolutions is derived their daily motion, which is different according to the size of their orbits; in proportion to this daily motion they pass through the asterisms. One which moves swiftly passes through them in a short time; one which moves slowly, in a long time. By their movement, the revolution is accounted complete at the end of the asterism Revati. Sixty seconds make a minute; sixty of these, a degree; of thirty of the latter is composed a sign (rashi); twelve of these are a revolution (bhagana).



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