

Besides their vital role in a natal chart, the lunar mansions also play a crucial part in revealing the specific qualities of each day.

The Nakshatras in Daily Astrology: Does Today's Star Have Roots or Wings?

by Tamiko Fischer



When Rosa Parks refused to give her seat on the bus to a white male passenger in the early evening of December 1, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, the Moon was in Ardra Nakshatra, one of the most severe and intense of *nakshatras*, or lunar mansions. To those who are familiar with some of the symbolic and evocative qualities of the 27 (or 28) *nakshatras* of Jyotish,¹ the Moon's sojourn in this particular "star" or sector of the zodiac is strikingly fitting for an act of defiance that was pivotal in challenging and toppling laws that legalized race segregation in the United States. Ardra ("The Moist") Nakshatra is symbolized as a teardrop and has associations with Rudra, the fierce and destructive form of the Hindu deity Lord Shiva. Under this star, it is believed that tears are shed (or upheavals occur) that lead to purification. Extending from 6°40' to 20° sidereal Gemini, Ardra Nakshatra has sharp, ferocious, and bitter qualities that naturally encourage severe and drastic actions. Who knows how events might have unfolded had the Moon been passing through one of the more mild-mannered or passive asterisms at the decisive moment when Rosa Parks was ordered to stand and give up her seat?

For newcomers to Vedic astrology, the *nakshatras* are probably best known for their highly revealing role in the natal birth chart. Truly a crowning glory of this system, the *nakshatras* are uniquely Indian in origin and have been in continual use for thousands of years; each

nakshatra contains numerous layers of meaning and imagery. These "stars" are more specifically 27 equal divisions of the zodiac, and each division contains a principal star. Each *nakshatra* measures 13°20' — a portion that roughly corresponds to the daily movement of the Moon. (See **Table**, page 70.) While every planet's *nakshatra* placement is significant in a natal chart, it is the Moon's *nakshatra* that is of prime importance. In India, people readily inquire about each other's lunar *Janma Nakshatra* ("Birth-Star"), much in the same way that we in the West share the details of our tropical Sun signs.

A great deal of Vedic astrology's predictive prowess comes via the *Janma Nakshatra*. How so? In *Vimshottari Dasha*, the well-known and remarkable 120-year loop of planetary timing cycles and sub-cycles that is a cornerstone system for predicting events in the natal birth chart, the first major planetary cycle (*mahadasha*) a person sees at birth is always that of their *Janma Nakshatra*'s ruling planet, and the subsequent major cycles unfold in a set order. In other words, simply knowing a person's

lunar *nakshatra* reveals the major planetary influences they experienced at birth. This gives a picture of their current underlying astrological reality and whether they've seen life through a lens strongly colored by jovial and expansive Jupiter, structured and duty-bound Saturn, youthful and enterprising Mercury, detached and otherworldly Ketu (the Moon's South Node), comfort-loving and romantic Venus, or another planet's powerfully permeating *dasha* influence.

We Share the Same Sky: Beyond the Natal Chart

Besides their vital role in a natal chart, the lunar mansions also play a crucial part in revealing the specific qualities of each day. Electional astrology, or the practice of choosing astrologically auspicious timing for any endeavor, is the branch of Vedic astrology known as *Muhurta*. In classical *Muhurta*, an immense sea of factors add up to make a specific moment either naturally promising or obstructive. Since actions tend to give results according to the astrological influences under which they are initiated, it is desirable to begin endeavors — especially those of life-altering significance — at a moment that gracefully promotes the intention of the activity and the well-being and discernment of the person performing the action. *Muhurta* considerations range from being fairly broad (such as whether the Sun is on its generally more auspicious northern path, for instance) to being relatively fleeting (such as whether the specific hour of the day is governed by

Nakshatras

a naturally malefic planet like Saturn or a gentler influence like Jupiter).

In Muhurta, the Moon's nakshatra is a key consideration for understanding the day's atmosphere. Symbolically, the nakshatras are regarded as the Moon's 27 wives, signifying his *shakti*, or creative potential (yes, the Moon becomes a male planet in this context). Life on Earth becomes permeated with a unique quality and mood as the Moon is empowered by the company of a different star each night of every 27.3-day-long sidereal lunar month. As a harem of perpetually rotating consorts, the nakshatras are the most lyrical, colorful, and symbolic element of classical Muhurta.

The Seven Types of Nakshatra

Each nakshatra has a variety of attributes, but the following seven major categories greatly determine the types of activities suited to each star. The quoted descriptions of favorable activities come from *Muhurta Chintamani*,² a well-known ancient Muhurta text:

Fixed/Constant

The Fixed (*Sthira*) nakshatras are four in number. They are Rohini, Uttara Phalguni, Uttara Ashadha, and Uttara Bhadrapada.

Activities favored: "... things of a permanent nature, things concerning one's house, sowing of seeds, things or rites done for getting peace, and the planting of a small garden can be auspiciously done."

These steady stars favor actions that create stability, such as laying foun-

dations, doing long-term planning, or making long-term investments. The solid nature of these stars may slow down travel, the return of lent money, and other activities where lightness and quickness are desirable.

Moveable

The Moveable (*Chara*) nakshatras are five in number. They are Punarvasu, Swati, Shravana, Dhanishtha, and Shatabhishak.

Activities favored: "... riding an elephant, walking in a garden, and things which are to be done in the Nakshatras called Laghu may be auspiciously done."

Since astrology was employed in courts of royalty, and Jyotish texts were often composed with imperial activities in mind, descriptions in ancient astrological texts often lean toward the genteel, very grand, or heroic. In a modern context, the days when the Moon is in these energetic stars encourage actions that require swiftness, such as travel, sports, driving, and lively negotiations — but are not the best influence for grounding actions, such as setting a foundation, planting a large tree, or being still.

Aggressive/Cruel

The Aggressive/Cruel (*Ugra-Krur*) stars are five in number. They are Bharani, Magha, Purva Phalguni, Purva Ashadha, and Purva Bhadrapada.

Activities favored: "... ambush (killing someone), burning (of a house, etc.), deception (cheating someone), poisoning (giving poison to someone or to one's own self), using weapons (using or making weapons) — these things may be effectively done. And the things which are to be performed in those

called 'Daruna' (Horrible) may also be performed in those called Ugra-Krur."

One can assume that these curiously violent-sounding descriptions most likely served in planning military strategy. In the context of modern daily life, these stars favor actions that contain an element of intentional violence or that may require extra courage, such as surgery, poisoning (which might play out as doing needed pest control or being involved in research on poisonous medicines), or using weapons and other sharp instruments. These stars can make for experiences where there is an element of strong desire or ruthlessness behind polite appearances, such as in situations of slick salesmanship, office politics, and other modern-day battlefields.

Mixed and Ordinary (also called Soft and Hot/Sharp)

The Mixed (*Mishra*) stars are two in number. They are Kritika and Vishakha.

Activities favored: "... In these, Agnihotra (the burning of the sacred fire), deeds of adulteration (mixing), Vrashotsarga (giving of an ox for getting one's desires fulfilled) may be auspiciously done. And the things which are to be done in the Nakshatras called Ugra (Cruel) may also be effectively performed in them."

These stars are generally best for sticking to familiar routines rather than undertaking ventures of major long-term importance. Are these stars favorable for *agnihotra* worship (the offering up of various pure substances into a sacrificial fire) because this is a "mixing" of orderly and refined human-created ritual with nature's untamed and roaring fire ele-



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ment? Or maybe, since these stars are somewhat unfavorable, the atmosphere would readily benefit from this form of astrological remedy. The act of giving an ox in charity with the expectation of gaining something in return is a lively example of a “mixed” activity, owing to its mixed intention.

Light/Short and Dynamic/Quick

The Light (*Laghu*) stars are four in number. They are Ashwini, Pushya, Hasta, and Abhijit (see Note 1).

Activities favored: “... In these the business of selling, sexual intercourse, learning of the *shastras*, getting jewels made and wearing them, the 64 *kalas*, *shilpa*, and those things which are advised to be performed in the Nakshatras called Chara may be auspiciously begun and performed.”

To provide a little Vedic cultural background information, the term *shashtra* means sacred scriptural teachings. The 64 *kalas* refer to various traditional practical arts and crafts of India that include diverse pastimes such as the art of graceful conversation, singing, acting, culinary arts, mixing drinks, carpentry, hair care, making perfumes or herbal formulas, adorning the body with cosmetics, gambling, betting sports that involve animals (e.g., cockfighting), and testing the purity of precious metals and gems. *Shilpa* means technical workmanship that includes sculpture and architecture.

In a modern context, these stars favor actions characterized by lightness, creativity, dexterity, or enjoyment, such as travel, socializing, leisurely shopping; lively, playful, or romantic meetings; public speaking; and uplifting devotional practices and rituals.

Gentle/Tender and Friendly

The Tender (*Mridu*) nakshatras are four in number. They are Mrigashira, Chitra, Anuradha, and Revati.

Activities favored: “... learning and singing of songs, getting clothes prepared and wearing them, playing games, the things relating to friends, getting jewels and wearing them may be auspiciously done.”

These stars support actions of a gentle, nurturing, or friendly nature where sensitivity, purity, or idealism are

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desired, such as when interrelating with children, receiving gentle healing work, being part of joyful gatherings, or creating delicate works of beauty.

Sharp/Bitter and Horrible/Hard

The Sharp (*Tikshna*) stars are four in number. They are Ardra, Ashlesha, Jyeshtha, and Mula.

Activities favored: “... Abhichar Karma (Marana or killing someone), Mohan or hypnotizing someone, Uchchatan (distraction), Tantrika experiments, deeds of ambush and of horror, causing difference among friends (that is, causing quarrel by backbiting), and training and tying of an animal, these things may be effectively and auspiciously done.”

While some of these descriptions sound like they are fit only for the appointment book of an assassin or an evil wizard, it may be good to keep in mind here the intentional role of hyperbole in these ancient astrological texts: to keep them vivid and thus memorable. In modern daily life, these stars naturally support activities characterized by separation or harshness, which may play out as ending a relationship, setting necessary boundaries, compassionate acts of “tough love” that have a severe appearance, demolishing a structure, disciplining a house pet, casting off unneeded belongings, and other actions where sentimental attachment would be a basic hindrance.

The Testing Ground of Muhurta: Mundane Astrology

To get a practical sense of how these stars shape a specific experience, we can turn our attention to mundane astrology and study the influences in

effect during some well-known environmental catastrophes and historical events, to see how the day’s nakshatra is deeply revealing.

The Ferocity of Sharp and Bitter Stars

The Sharp/Bitter (*Tikshna*) or Horrible (*Daruna*) stars, Mula, Ardra, and Ashlesha, are three of the most severe and intense nakshatras. It is fitting to see these harsh stars playing a role during these recent devastating natural and man-made disasters:

The Haiti earthquake occurred on January 12, 2010. On that day, the Moon was in Mula Nakshatra. This is a star with subterranean meanings and is symbolized as a tied bunch of tree roots. Mula’s associated deity is Nirriti, goddess of disaster, as well as the scarcity-inducing Alakshmi (the antithesis of Lakshmi, the goddess who grants prosperity). The creative energy, or shakti, of Mula is “To Ruin or Destroy.”³

Hurricane Katrina lasted from August 23 until August 29, 2005. Within this time frame, the Moon was in Ardra Nakshatra on Sunday, August 28, at 3:08 p.m. until Monday, August 29, at 5:48 p.m. CDT. This window of time coincides with the hurricane’s peak intensity and devastation. On the afternoon and evening of August 28, thousands of people poured into the Louisiana Superdome in a mandatory evacuation under disturbingly nightmarish conditions. On the morning of August 29, the levees of New Orleans broke, which led to extensive flooding, and the hurricane touched down on land to destroy much of the cities of Biloxi and Gulfport, Mississippi.

When the Asian tsunami occurred on December 26, 2004, the Moon was in Ardra Nakshatra for a portion of this day as well. The Moon was in Ardra Nakshatra from 5:49 a.m. on December 26 until 8:43 a.m. UT on December 27. The Moon entered this star approximately two hours after the tsunami gained new momentum as waves refracted around a land mass, creating a “wrap-around effect” that devastated Sri Lanka and parts of India and Maldives, several hours before the wave eventually ended its journey off the coast of East Africa. Ardra (“The Moist”)

The 27 Nakshatras and Their Major Qualities

	<i>Nakshatra</i>	<i>Zodiacal Position (sidereal)</i>	<i>Nature</i>
1	Ashwini	Aries 0°00' – 13°20'	Quick-Light (<i>Kshipra-Laghu</i>)
2	Bharani	Aries 13°20' – 26°40'	Aggressive-Cruel (<i>Ugra-Krur</i>)
3	Krittika	Aries 26°40' – Taurus 10°00'	Mixed-Ordinary (<i>Mishra-Sadharana</i>)
4	Rohini	Taurus 10°00' – 23°20'	Fixed-Steady (<i>Dhruva-Sthira</i>)
5	Mrigashira	Taurus 23°20' – Gemini 6°40'	Tender-Friendly (<i>Mridu-Maitra</i>)
6	Ardra	Gemini 6°40' – 20°00'	Sharp-Horrible (<i>Tikshna-Daruna</i>)
7	Punarvasu	Gemini 20°00' – Cancer 3°20'	Moveable (<i>Chara</i>)
8	Pushya	Cancer 3°20' – 16°40'	Quick-Light (<i>Kshipra-Laghu</i>)
9	Ashlesha	Cancer 16°40' – 30°00'	Sharp-Horrible (<i>Tikshna-Daruna</i>)
10	Magha	Leo 0°00' – 13°20'	Aggressive-Cruel (<i>Ugra-Krur</i>)
11	Purva Phalguni	Leo 13°20' – 26°40'	Aggressive-Cruel (<i>Ugra-Krur</i>)
12	Uttara Phalguni	Leo 26°40' – Virgo 10°00'	Fixed-Steady (<i>Dhruva-Sthira</i>)
13	Hasta	Virgo 10°00' – 23°20'	Quick-Light (<i>Kshipra-Laghu</i>)
14	Chitra	Virgo 23°20' – Libra 6°40'	Tender-Friendly (<i>Mridu-Maitra</i>)
15	Swati	Libra 6°40' – 20°00'	Moveable (<i>Chara</i>)
16	Vishakha	Libra 20°00' – Scorpio 3°20'	Mixed-Ordinary (<i>Mishra-Sadharana</i>)
17	Anuradha	Scorpio 3°20' – 16°40'	Tender-Friendly (<i>Mridu-Maitra</i>)
18	Jyeshtha	Scorpio 16°40' – 30°00'	Sharp-Horrible (<i>Tikshna-Daruna</i>)
19	Mula	Sagittarius 0°00' – 13°20'	Sharp-Horrible (<i>Tikshna-Daruna</i>)
20	Purva Ashadha	Sagittarius 13°20' – 26°40'	Aggressive-Cruel (<i>Ugra-Krur</i>)
21	Uttara Ashadha	Sagittarius 26°40' – Capricorn 10°00'	Fixed-Steady (<i>Dhruva-Sthira</i>)
22	Shravana	Capricorn 10°00' – 23°20'	Moveable (<i>Chara</i>)
23	Dhanishtha	Capricorn 23°20' – Aquarius 6°40'	Moveable (<i>Chara</i>)
24	Shatabhishak	Aquarius 6°40' – 20°00'	Moveable (<i>Chara</i>)
25	Purva Bhadrapada	Aquarius 20°00' – Pisces 3°20'	Aggressive-Cruel (<i>Ugra-Krur</i>)
26	Uttara Bhadrapada	Pisces 3°20' – 16°40'	Fixed-Steady (<i>Dhruva-Sthira</i>)
27	Revati	Pisces 16°40' – 30°00'	Tender-Friendly (<i>Mridu-Maitra</i>)

Nakshatras

Nakshatra is symbolized as a teardrop. It is associated with Rudra, god of dissolution and storm, whose name has meanings of howling and crying. The shakti of Ardra is that of “making effort.”

On the day that the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig collapsed and sank into the Gulf of Mexico (April 22, 2010, 40 miles southeast of the Louisiana coast), the Moon was in Ashlesha Nakshatra. Ashlesha Nakshatra’s symbol is a coiling serpent, and its name translates as “The Entwining.” Its deity is Sarpa, a serpent-god, and its shakti is “to inflict with poison.” This is a very primal, persuasive, and shrewd-natured star that has connotations of strong substances and noxious chemicals — the winding serpent-like trail of a massive oil spill (with secretive circumstances surrounding the disaster) is all too heartbreakingly evocative an image.

Other Milestones and the Day’s Nakshatra

The first Earth Day on April 22, 1970 in the U.S. marked the beginning of the modern environmental movement. On this day at sunrise, the Moon was in Swati Nakshatra and later entered Vishakha Nakshatra at 9:45 a.m. EST. For an event that has both educational and activist intentions, the expressive star Swati Nakshatra is appropriate, because it has an association with Saraswati, goddess of learning. This star is governed by Vayu, the god of wind, and it is symbolized as a fragile young tree or sprout quivering in the wind. Like Earth Day itself, Swati represents new beginnings and a struggle for survival and growth. Its shakti is “to scatter like the wind.” This day’s other star, Vishakha Nakshatra, is associated with Indraghni, god of lightning and fire, and its shakti is to “achieve many and various fruits.” Vishakha is symbolized as a triumphal gateway decorated with leaves. A highly fitting influence for an activist gathering, Vishakha has courageous, goal-oriented, and potentially confrontational qualities.

When President Barack Obama was inaugurated on January 20, 2009, the Moon was in Anuradha Nakshatra.

Anuradha’s deity is Mitra, the divine friend and lord of compassion. This star has strong humanitarian as well as multicultural and foreign meanings. Obama is renowned for being a strikingly amicable presidential personality who, in his early professional life, worked as a civil rights lawyer and a community organizer. He is truly a multicultural “outlier.” His race certainly makes him a pioneer, but among U.S. presidents he is also an uncommon citizen-of-the-world from ethnically diverse Hawaii, and he lived in Indonesia for several years while growing up. The shakti of Anuradha is “Worship and Devotion,” and its symbol is identical to that of Vishakha: a triumphal archway decorated with leaves.

Let’s return to Rosa Parks and her daring refusal to budge from her bus seat. Her arrest precipitated the momentous Montgomery Alabama Bus Boycott, an organized mass protest that coincided with her court trial on December 5, 1955. This act of civil disobedience lasted 381 days and resulted in legislation that overturned the mandatory separate seating of blacks and whites on public buses. The Moon was in Magha Nakshatra on the day of the trial. Magha Nakshatra’s deity is the Pitris, or “Ancestral Fathers.” This regal star that makes up the beginning of sidereal Leo has strong associations with royal magnificence, pride, and awareness of one’s history and lineage — an apt influence for an organized protest intended to challenge legalized segregation and reclaim the human dignity of a race. Magha means “reward or bounty,” and it is symbolized as a royal throne room. Its shakti is that of “leaving the body,” a fitting dynamic for casting off laws based on a body’s skin color.

Beyond Good and Evil Stars

Although some stars are certainly much more pleasant-sounding than others, it is most accurate to view each nakshatra as describing an underlying dynamic, not as a simplistic agent of good or bad. For purposes of study, it is necessary to understand an astrological influence in isolation, but astrology is a discipline of recognizing the numerous converging collective and personal influences that all shape an experience.

The most severe of stars are capable of bestowing desirable experiences — much in the same way a sharp knife is simply a pointed instrument that can either mutilate a person in an attack or save their life when placed in the hands of a skilled surgeon. Likewise, when coupled with powerful planetary afflictions (for instance, if the Moon itself is eclipsed or closely conjunct or powerfully aspected by malefic planets), nakshatras that have nurturing and gentle qualities certainly do have the potential to bring unwanted experiences — just as a bouquet of flowers can seem fragrant and fresh but may ultimately be allergy-inducing, given the right set of circumstances. But when it comes to gaining insight into whether one’s implement of choice is likely to be a sharp instrument or a delicate flower on a given day, the essential nature of the Moon’s placement in a nakshatra is a deeply revealing and vitally important consideration.

Knowing whether a star naturally favors putting down roots, taking flight on wings, or courageously reclaiming one’s dignity on the bus is a key to cultivating clear-sighted and graceful daily action.

References and Notes

1. For most practical purposes, there are 27 nakshatras; however, for Muhurta (electional) purposes, there is a very rarely used 28th star known as Abhijit Nakshatra, with an irregular size of 4°13’40”. It extends from 6°40’ to 10°53’40” in sidereal Capricorn, i.e., from the last quarter of Uttara Ashadha to the beginning of Shrivana Nakshatra.
2. Daivagye Acharya Shriram, *Muhurta Chintamani*, trans. Girish Chand Sharma, Sagar Publications, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 49–51.
3. The shakti of each nakshatra appears in Ernst Wilhelm’s book, *Classical Muhurta* (Kala Occult Publishers, 2003), p. 54. These descriptions originally come from an ancient Vedic text called *Taittiriya Brahmana* 1.5.1.

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