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Tropical zodiac for astrology for the east and the west

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Abstract

The whole edifice of Astrology rests on two vital considerations, namely, the astronomically correct horoscope for astrological divination and the correct planetary periods for the exact timing of events. The former demands to pin point the starting point of the zodiac, since there exist two types of zodiacs, Moving Zodiac of the West and the Fixed Zodiac of the East, in vogue. After careful examination of Oriental and Occidental literature, it is established that the Moving Zodiac is the astronomically correct one which starts its Aries “0°” from Vernal Equinox and not from *Aswini* Constellation “0°” of the Sidereal Zodiac for measuring of the planetary longitudes for astrological purposes either in the East or in the West and that the balance of planetary period at the time of birth is one based on the longitude of the Moon from the Vernal Equinox and not from *Asvini* for neither the twelve signs nor the planetary periods have any connection with the 27 asterisms.

Keywords: *Vedanga Jyotisha*, tropical zodiac, sidereal zodiac, vernal equinox, *Sveta Varāha Kalpa*, precession of equinoxes, *Ayanāmsa*, *Horoscope*

Introduction

Jyotisha (ज्योतिष, *jyotiṣa* or *jyotish*) refers to ‘astronomy’ or “*Vedic Astrology*” and represents the fifth of the six *Vedāngas* (additional sciences to be studied along with the Vedas). *Jyotisha* concerns itself with the study and prediction of the movements of celestial bodies, in order to calculate the auspicious time for rituals and ceremonies. The astronomical *siddhāntas* and the genesis of the principles of *Vedic Astrology* are all based on the assumption that all the Planets were in celestial conjunction in Aries 0° except *Rāhu* (North Lunar Node) which is situated 0° in the Sign *Libra* at the beginning of *Sveta Varāha Kalpa* (Eon) (Figure 1) [1].



Fig 1: Planets' Position at the beginning of *Sveta Varāha Kalpa* (Eon)

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The Zodiac

The planets move round the Sun in a circular belt of space in the heavens, about 16 degrees in breadth with 8 degrees on either side of the ecliptic. This Milky Way is called the Zodiac. We have seen that the ecliptic is the elliptical path among the fixed stars in which the Earth revolves round the Sun as its centre. Though a series of 88 constellations lie along this belt, *Vedānga* recognizes only the 27 constellations that lie equidistant along this belt. We have also seen that this is the apparent path of the Sun viewed from the center of the Earth. This belt is comprehensive enough to accommodate the movements of all the planets. It is along this path that we have to locate the positions of the planets. This belt of 360° of space in length is divided into 12 equal parts of 30° degrees each and each is called a Sign or *Rāsi*. (Figure 2) [2].

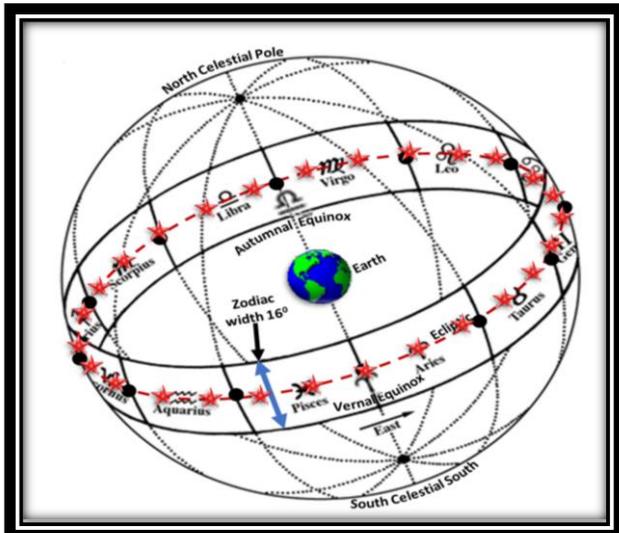


Fig 2: Zodiac and 27 Lunar Constellations along the Ecliptic

The ancients are said to have named these signs after the supposed resemblances of the constellations occupying them during their time. While the resemblances of the asterisms to certain objects (*Asvini*- horse, *Bharani* - female genital organ, *Krittika* – Barber’s Razor, etc.) are true and are seen in the sky, the suggested resemblances of the signs to certain beings or objects (Aries - Ram, Taurus – Bull, Gemini Male and Female, etc.) are purely symbolical (Figure 3) [3].

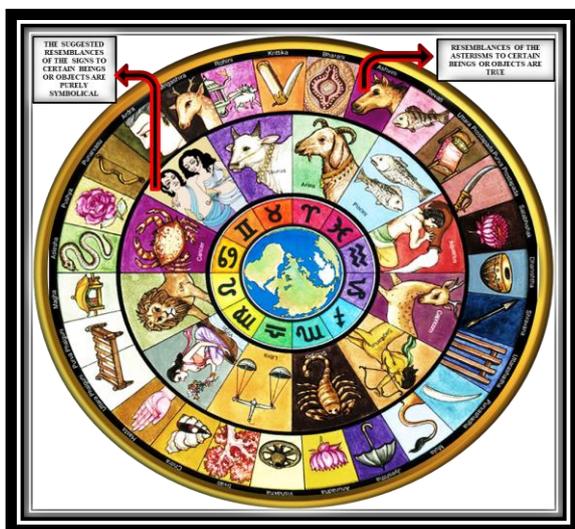


Fig 3: The Resemblances of the Asterisms to Certain Beings or Objects are True and the Suggested Resemblances of the Signs to Certain Beings or Objects are Symbolical

There is another strange circumstance. The Aries of the moving zodiac and the Aries of the fixed zodiac with their independent starting points of the zodiac should both have the same appearance, if the names of the signs have any relationship with their resemblance. The westerners with the moving zodiac and the Indians with the fixed zodiac should both pretend to see the same appearances in the various signs. While it is clear that similar appearances cannot be seen by both the parties, in signs no longer common to both in the zodiac, the names of the twelve signs are however common to the East and the West and continue to be the same. Evidently the signs are not named after their resemblances to certain objects or beings but after their sympathy with the natures of certain object or beings. To put it more correctly, the objects or beings after which the signs are named are symbolical of the natures of the signs.

Horoscope

A chart or diagram of a horoscope is no more than the representation of the Zodiac, with the correct positions of the planets therein for the given time and in relation to it, in some convenient form. The zodiac may be represented on paper as a circle. This is really the correct way of drawing the chart. The more correct way would be to represent it as an ellipse. But the convenient way, however, is a rectangular diagram like the one adopted in Indian Horoscopy.

Difference between Vedic Astrology & Western Astrology

Vedic Astrology has been in vogue since times immemorial as one of the *Vedāngas* in the Vedic Paradigm whereas Western Astrology is relatively new as compared to Vedic Astrology. The main difference between *Vedic* and Western astrology is that the former adopts the fixed zodiac (*Nirāyana* Zodiac or Sidereal Zodiac) while the other uses moving zodiac (*Śāyana* Zodiac or Tropical Zodiac). Western Astrology uses the tropical Zodiac, where the earth is considered to be the centre and the celestial bodies to be revolving around it. It is based on the idea that the Sun comes back to the same point of vernal equinox after each revolution. Vernal equinox is the celestial event during which the Sun is overhead the equator (the line that divides the earth into two equal parts). The vernal equinox always on March 22 each year when day and night are of equal length. Therefore, in Western Astrology, Vernal Equinox is the starting point of the zodiac that dictates the first

sign, Aries, and followed by the rest of the signs (Figures 4 and 5).

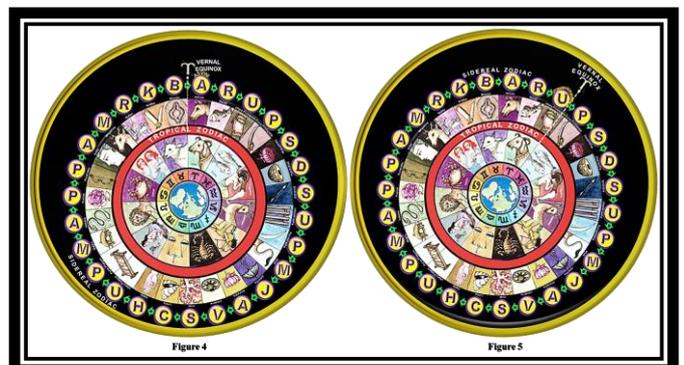


Fig 4(Left): Alignment of Sidereal Zodiac (starting with Asvini Star) and Tropical Zodiac (starting from Vernal Equinox) in 285 A.D.

Fig 5: (Right): Vernal Equinox is in the 4th Quarter of Uttarabhādrapada Star about 24° away from Asvini Star in 2020

Vernal Equinox and Precession of Equinoxes

The term 'Equinoxes' denotes equal nights and days throughout the world, which occur only twice in a year, the Vernal Equinox or spring equinox or March equinox or Northward equinox about the 21st of March and the Autumnal Equinox about the 23rd of September, as at present. Between these two we have the Summer Solstice about the 22nd of June and the Winter Solstice about the 22nd of December. Whatever may be the starting point of the zodiac, the beginning of the four quarters of the year is beyond controversy. While March 21st and September 23rd indicate equal nights and days throughout the world; also, either of the two points in the sky where the ecliptic (the Sun's annual pathway) and the celestial equator intersect. June 22nd and December 22nd indicate the longest day and the longest night respectively. The dates slightly vary due to leap years and other factors (Figure 6) [4].

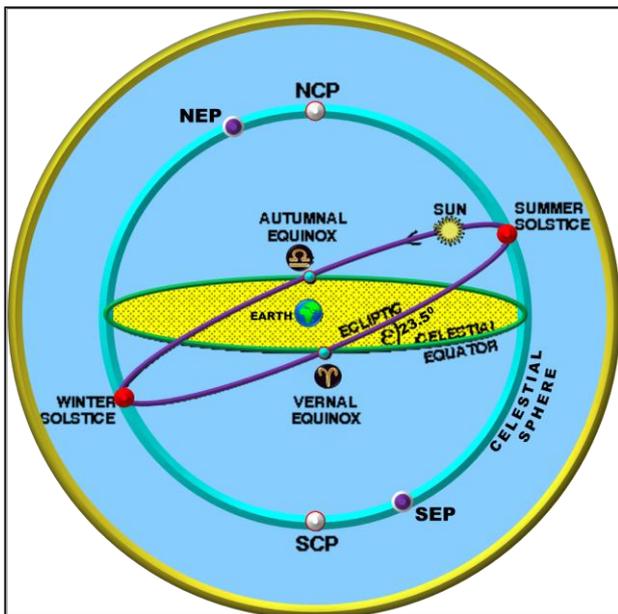


Fig 6: The Celestial Sphere, The Equinoxes and the Solstices

The return of the seasons is a permanent factor and we know these seasons are brought about exactly after the same number of days. It is on these phenomena that the European tropical year is based, which means the year which begins the same season after the same number of days. The tropical year is the interval between two consecutive passages of the Sun through the same Equinox, and due to precession, the equinoxes will precede their usual time year after year. About March 21st as at present, the Sun starts in all his brilliance in his annual course from the Vernal Equinox and this phenomenon marks the beginning of the tropical or astronomical year.

With reference to the fixed stars, vernal equinox moves westward opposite to the yearly motion of Sun at a rate of around 50.26 seconds (more accurately 50 seconds) of arc annually which is also called precession of the equinoxes or *ayanāmsa*. This is because earth's axis also rotates and completes one rotation in about 26000 years. *Vedic* Astrology also takes into account this slight shift in earth's position, which has shifted the starting point of sidereal zodiac to about

25 degrees west from the 0^o Vernal Equinox of western system. Due to this phenomenon, the Aries of Western Astrology keeps drifting away farther and farther away from the 0^o Aries point of Sidereal Astrology at a rate of 1 degree every 72 years. At present, this difference is about 24 degrees in past 2000 years. Aries of Western Astrology and Aries of Sidereal Astrology were on the same plane was approximately 285 AD [5].

The controversy, however, between the Fixed and the Moving Zodiacs --- the *Nirāyana* and *Śāyana* Determinations --- has been raging in India more or less acutely and, in almost every conference of astronomers and astrologers of more recent times, the question was mooted along with the vexed question of the *Ayanāmsa*, but only to widen the gulf and accentuate the differences between the opposing camps, the orthodox section crying hoarsely against the adoption of the moving Zodiac given for astrological purposes, leaving alone religious purposes and observances. But truth cannot be suppressed indefinitely. The citadels of orthodoxy have to be broken through and ill-informed criticism has to be faced with missionary zeal, in the hope and belief that facts are bound to be more eloquent than mere criticism and finally emerge successful ushering the renaissance of astrology.

Where Does the Zodiac Begin?

The question that arises uppermost is as to the first point from which the longitudes of the planets have to be measured. In other words, we have to fix the starting point of the zodiac. It is needless to state that the longitudes of the planets cannot be measured and their positions determined, unless there is a point to measure from. Common sense suggests that this point cannot and ought not to be arbitrary. It should be associated with some determinable and demonstrable astronomical phenomenon. The 27 asterisms are clusters of stars that lie along the Zodiac, and may be divided into twelve constellations of a somewhat irregular extent. But there is absolutely nothing to indicate why a particular asterism should be preferred to any other as the starting point of the Zodiac. The 27 asterisms may be imagined to be merely 27 fixed lampposts or milestones along the ecliptic. No particular milestone or lamppost could be regarded as possessing any special significance or bearing on the determination of the starting point of the zodiac.

Srimad Bhāgavatam, reveals the same as does *Yavana Jataka* – the Indians were not aware of precession for at least a few centuries. *Sutras* 2-6 of 21st discourse of the mythological and philosophical classic, *Srimad Bhāgavatam* reveal that the 'Vedic Zodiac' is "Tropical". In India, *Varāhamihira*, to whom we owe largely the beginnings of Indian Astronomy as well as of Indian Astrology, and who is considered to have figured about 520 A.D., has given us the clue for fixing this starting point of the zodiac. No clues earlier than the time of *Varāhamihira* seem to be available on the determination of this vital question. Before we can understand *Varāhamihira*, we have to acquaint ourselves with the names of the signs and the asterisms referred to by him in Sanskrit. The Names of the 12 signs or *Rāsīs* in the conventional order are as follows (Table 1).

Table 1: The Names of the 12 Signs or *Rāsis* in the conventional order

Sl. No.	NAMES OF THE SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC			SYMBOL OF OBJECT OR BEING	ASTRONOMICAL SYMBOL
	SANSKRIT	LATIN	ENGLISH		
1	<i>Mesha</i>	Aries	The Ram		♈
2	<i>Vrishabha</i>	Taurus	The Bull		♉
3	<i>Midhuna</i>	Gemini	The Pair		♊
4	<i>Kataka</i>	Cancer	The Crab		♋
5	<i>Simha</i>	Leo	The Lion		♌
6	<i>Kanya</i>	Virgo	The Virgin		♍
7	<i>Tula</i>	Libra	The Balance		♎
8	<i>Vrischika</i>	Scorpio	The Scorpion		♏
9	<i>Dhanus</i>	Sagittarius	The Archer		♐
10	<i>Makara</i>	Capricorn	The Crocodile		♑
11	<i>Kumbha</i>	Aquarius	The Water-bearer		♒
12	<i>Meena</i>	Pisces	The Pair of Fish		♓

Table 2: The Sanskrit names of the 27 Asterisms or *Nakshatrās*, beginning with the conventionally leading asterism

Sl. No.	STAR : CATALOGUE NAME	Sl. No.	STAR : CATALOGUE NAME	Sl. No.	STAR : CATALOGUE NAME
1	<i>Asvini : βArietis</i>	10	<i>Makha : αLeoni</i>	19	<i>Moola : λScorpii</i>
2	<i>Bharani : 41Arietis</i>	11	<i>Pubba : δLeonis</i>	20	<i>Purvashadha : δSagittarii</i>
3	<i>Krittika : ηTauri</i>	12	<i>Uttara : βLeonis</i>	21	<i>Uttarashadha : σSagittarii</i>
4	<i>Rohini : αTauri</i>	13	<i>Hasta : δCorvi</i>	22	<i>Sravana : αAquilae</i>
5	<i>Mrigasira : λOrionis</i>	14	<i>Chitra : αVirginis</i>	23	<i>Dhanishta : λAquarii</i>
6	<i>Ardra : αOrionis</i>	15	<i>Swati : αBootis</i>	24	<i>Satabhisha : αDelphini</i>
7	<i>Punarvasu : βGeminorum</i>	16	<i>Visakha : αLibrae</i>	25	<i>Purvabhadra : αPegasi</i>
8	<i>Pushyami : δCancri</i>	17	<i>Anuradha : δScorpii</i>	26	<i>Uttarabhadra : γPegasi</i>
9	<i>Aslesha : εHydrae</i>	18	<i>Jyeshtha : αScorpii</i>	27	<i>Revati : ζPiscium</i>

A few observations have also to be made before we can follow *Varāhamihira*¹ with advantage. The 27 asterisms or *Nakshatrās* are, no doubt, 27 natural divisions of the ecliptic. Each of them roughly measures, therefore, $360/27 = 13\frac{1}{3}$ degrees of space. This is roughly the space travelled by the Moon along the stars in the course of a single day and night. There is nothing, however to choose between one asterism and another, as already observed, for fixing the starting point of the zodiac. The first amongst the twelve signs into which the zodiac is divided is conventionally named Aries or *Mesha*. The question, therefore, narrows down to the short point as to where in the ecliptic 0 degree Aries or *Mesha* should begin.

Vernal Equinoctial Point in *Vedānga Jyotisha* and *Varāhamihira*'s Time

Varāhamihira's in his two well-known works on astronomy, *Brihat Samhita* and *Pancha Siddhāntika*, states that at one time *Dakshināyana* (the southward journey of the Sun or the Summer Solstice) took place when the Sun was in the middle of *Āslesa Nakshatra*, and that *Uttarāyana* (the northward journey of the Sun or the Winter Solstice) took place when the Sun was at the beginning of *Dhanishta Nakshatra*, but that in his own time, "as one might see for himself" (so he says), *Dakshināyana* occurred when the Sun was in the last quarter of *Punarvasu Nakshatra*. He observed that what had been

recorded by the ancients was correct for their time and that what he observed was correct for his time. Evidently, *Varāhamihira* was referring to the astronomical observations made in the *Vedānga Jyotisha* (a set of rules, quasi-astrological and quasi-astronomical and incorporated in the *Vedās*) about 1500 years before him. There is abundant authority that the *Vedānga Jyotisha* continued to be current till almost *Varāhamihirā's* time until he exploded it by his own observations. Observatories of some sort did exist at Ujjain in the time of *Vikramārka*, during whose reign *Varāhamihira* flourished.

आश्लेषार्द्धाक्षिणमुत्तरमयनं रवेर्धनिष्टायम् ।
नूनं कदाचिदासीद्येनोक्तं पूर्वशास्त्रेषु ॥१॥
साम्प्रतमयनं सवितुः कर्कटकाद्यं मृगादितश्चान्यत् ।
उक्ताभावो विकृतिः प्रत्यक्षपरीक्षणैर्व्यक्तिः ॥२॥
आश्लेषाधादासीद् यदा निवृत्तिः किलोष्णकिरणस्य ।
युक्तमयनं तदाऽऽसीत् सांप्रतमयनं पुनर्वसुतः ॥२१॥
----*Varāhamihira's Brihat Samhita* ^{16,71}

When *Varāhamihira* stated that at one time *Dakshināyana* or Summer Solstice took place when the Sun was in the middle of *Āślesa Nakshatra*, but that in his own time it was taking place when the Sun was in the last quarter of *Punarvasu Nakshatra* and that *Uttarāyana* or the Winter Solstice took place when the Sun was at the beginning of *Dhanishta Nakshatra*, but that in his own time, he surprised the Indian astronomical world with his observation, but not with a settled theory behind the change observed. He might not have considered that the change was due to an aberration or freak of nature. But he does not seem to have considered the change to be the result of a regular phenomenon with a uniform rate of retrogression. It is possible and even probable that he suspected a further change, since he ordained future astronomers to correctly ascertain the places of the planets by daily meridian observations, since error in calculation is as sinful as the murder of a *Brāhmin* ¹⁸.

स्फुटगणितविदिह लब्धा धर्मार्थयशांसि दिनकरादीनाम् ।
कुकरणकारस्सत्यं सहते नरके कृताऽऽवासाः ॥३७॥
Sphutanaganihavidiha labdhā dharmārthayashāmsi
dinakarādīnam
Kukaranakārasathyam sahate narake kruthāvāsaha

Purport: The person having correct knowledge of the Sun, Moon, etc., gets Dharma which will take care of his future world, Artha which will ensure his prosperity in this world and fame which will perpetuate his memoir. But the bad astronomer who misleads people by his writings will certainly have to go to hell and dwell there.

Though *Varāhamihira* was not able to theorise during his life the observations made by him, still he struck the first note in India of the effect of what is now too well-known, thanks to the western astronomical calculations, as the 'Precession of the Equinoxes' ¹⁹.

Vernal Equinox begins the Zodiac

About March 21st as at present, the Sun starts in all his brilliance in his annual course from the Vernal Equinox and this phenomenon marks the beginning of the tropical or astronomical year. If the Vernal Equinox starts the astronomical year, the question is very pertinent as to why the Vernal Equinoctial point should not start the Astrological Zodiac. Indeed, Western Astrology starts 0^oAries or *Mesha*

with the Vernal Equinoctial and the planetary longitudes are measured from this point.

This equinoctial point is not absolutely fixed. It is subject to a slight retrograde motion of about 50.26" a year (more accurately 50"). It is this retrogradation that is known as the Precession of the Equinoxes and that this point is subject to retrogression at a uniform rate of 50.26" a year. The effect of this phenomenon is to shorten the tropical year as compared with the sidereal year and to increase the longitudes of the fixed stars by this amount every year. It was this uniform increase in the longitudes of the fixed stars that attracted the attention of Hipparchus, to whom the discovery of precession is due and the physical cause of this motion was explained by *Newton*.

This leads us to what *Varāhamihira* observed. He found that the Summer Solstice had retrograded from the middle of *Āślesa Nakshatra* in the *Vedic* period to the last quarter of *Punarvasu Nakshatra* in his day, that is, to about 1¼ *Nakshatras'* extent or about 23½ degrees during a period of over 1500 years. We find that *Varāhamihira's* observations roughly tally, therefore, with modern astronomy as regards the rate of precession.

Since the Summer Solstice during the *Vedānga Jyotisha* period occurred about the middle of *Āślesā Nakshatra*, the Vernal Equinox must have then occurred about the beginning of *Krittika Nakshatra*, the seventh asterism backwards from *Āślesa*. In fact, *Krittika* was the first *Nakshatra* during the *Vedic* period. *Varāhamihira* knew it. Literature of his time referred to *Makha Nakshatra* as the eighth *Nakshatra*, which it could be only if *Krittika* was the first one. The Tamil *Manimekhalai* (of about the seventh or eighth century A.D.) speaks of *Viśākhā Nakshatra*, in which the Buddha was born, as the middle *Nakshatra* or the 14th one, which it could be only if the first one was *Krittika*. *Krittika* was the first *Nakshatra* evidently in the *Vedic* time, since the Vernal equinoctial point took place in that *Nakshatra*. The late *B.G.Tilak* in his *Orion* and *Prof. Jacobi* spoke of a period long prior to the *Vedānga Jyotisha* period, when the Vernal equinoctial point was in *Mrigaśira* and it was the first *Nakshatra*. *Varāhamihira* found that about 520 A.D. the Vernal Equinox occurred at the beginning of *Āśvini* and installed it as the leading asterism. He, therefore, started reckoning from *Āśvini*, about daily meridian observations for the guidance of the future astronomers. The question then is whether *Varāhamihira* started his astrological Zodiac or 0 degree *Mesha* with the first point of *Āśvini*, or with the Vernal equinoctial point, since both coincided more or less in his time. In other words, was his astrological zodiac a fixed or a moving one? The answer is obvious. If any *Nakshatra* was as good as any other for starting the astrological zodiac and the matter was purely one of convention or precedent, *Varāhamihira* must have been satisfied with *Krittika* itself for the beginning of *Mesha* or Aries. Knowing that *Krittika* was the first *Nakshatra* in vogue up to his time, there was no reason for him to have retrograded to *Āśvini* for his first *Nakshatra* along with the Vernal equinoctial point, unless he considered that this point was the indisputable starting point of both the astrological and the astronomical Zodiacs (Figure 7).

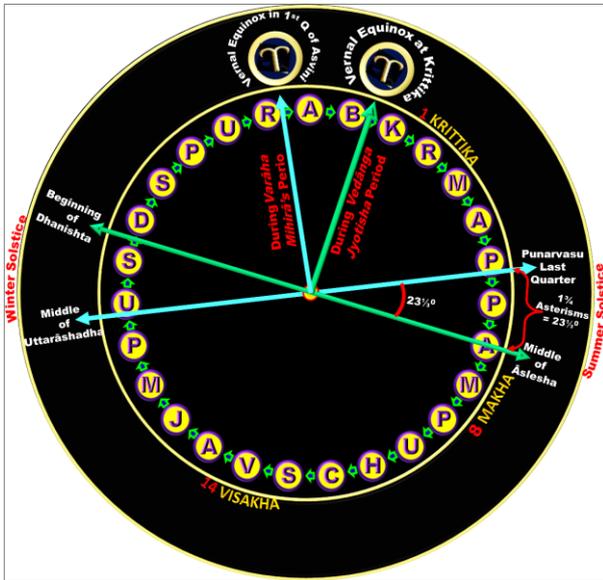


Fig 7: Vernal Equinox: (Krittika) in Vedānga Jyotisha Period and Āsvini in Varāhamihira's Period. Krittika was the 1st star, Makha is the 8th Star and Visākha is the 14th Star vide Tamil Manimekhalai

Discussion

Western Astronomy proves that the Indian Astronomy is right on the one hand and that Astronomy together with its counterpart Astrology cannot be nothing short of absolute science on the other. The ancient Indian Astronomers have evolved a scientific system of calculating the astronomical Zodiac while the astronomers of the medieval period lost sight of the principle of the 'Precession of the Equinoxes'; the Western Astronomers could rightly pick up and confirm the exactness of ancient Indian astronomers. It is a paradox that we appreciate the importance of certain originally Indian concepts only after foreigners praise them.

These astronomical observations confirm the various dates arrived at by the Sanskritists, historians, etc., regarding the composition of different works as well the different strata in the layers of Indian civilization and culture. Thus, while the Rig Veda was composed during 3000 – 4000 B.C., the Vedānga Jyotisha was composed in 1000 B.C., and while the Buddha lived in 520 B.C., Varāhamihira lived in 520 A.D. At the present day, the Vernal equinoctial point is in Uttarābhādrapada having retrograded to it in due course from Āsvini that is, to about 24.1° during a period of over 1500 years since the time of Varāhamihira in 520 A.D. to the present day, that is, the year 2020.

When the father of Indian Astronomy and Astrology felt compelled to change over from Krittika of Vedānga Jyotisha to Āsvini as the first Nakshatra of his day? The true Indian astrological and astronomical starting point of the Zodiac is, therefore, the Vernal equinoctial point, the same as in the West, and not Āsvini, one of the 27 lamp-posts or milestones. For astrological as well as astronomical purposes, we are, therefore, concerned only with the moving Zodiac, and not with the fixed Zodiac of the 27 asterisms beginning with Mrigaśira, Krittika or Āsvini as the case had been during the course of the ages, whenever reformers opened their eyes to facts. As each star parted company in due course with the equinoctial point, it came to be deprived of its leading character and its first place in the order of the stars. Formerly the Sun's entry into the constellations, Taurus, Leo, Scorpio, and Aquarius, marked respectively the commencement of the Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter seasons. When during the period of Varāhamihira the Sun was in the Ram at the

Vernal Equinox, the Ram became the leading constellation and the Sun's entry into the constellation (Aries) marked the beginning of the spring. The equinoctial points, now having stepped into the next constellations behind Aries and Libra, namely, Pisces and Virgo, we have to step back along with them. They will thus gradually shift their places backward from one constellation to the other along the ecliptic and we should therefore be shifting along with them. Instead of this perennial and periodical shifting from asterism to asterism, let us bid good-bye to the fixed zodiac of the stars and welcome the moving zodiac, mistakenly regarded as the zodiac of the West, now that we know the uniformity and annual value of the precession. Now, it is the longitudes of the planets from the vernal equinoctial point and the division of the zodiac into twelve signs from the same point, that we require for purposes of horoscopy either in the East or in the West.

Results

- The author is the first to bid good-bye to the Fixed Zodiac of the stars and welcome the Moving Zodiac, mistakenly regarded as the Zodiac of the West.
- The true Indian astrological and astronomical starting point of the Zodiac is the Vernal Equinoctial Point, the same as in the West, and not Āsvini, the first asterism.
- At present, the Vernal Equinoctial Point is in Uttarābhādrapada, having retrograded into it in due course since 520 A.D.
- The Illustrative Horoscopes in Varāhamihira's Brihat Jātaka are Śāyana Horoscopes.
- The ancient Indian Astronomers have evolved a scientific system of calculating the starting point of the Zodiac while the astronomers of the medieval period lost sight of the principle of 'Precession of the Equinoxes'
- Neither the twelve signs nor the planetary periods have any connection with the 27 asterisms.
- Ayanāmsā (the length of the Indian Precession) is a vexatious and highly controversial problem amongst the Indian Astronomers and Astrologers.
- Indian Pundits have stuck on to the Nirāyana System ignoring Varāhamihira's pronouncements.
- Ayanāmsā cannot be obtained by direct observation.
- The operation at birth of a particular planetary period and the length of the unexpired portion thereof are based on the exact position occupied by the Moon (longitude of the Moon from the Vernal Equinoctial Point) at the moment of birth.
- The resemblances of the asterisms to certain objects are true while the suggested resemblances of the signs to certain beings or objects are purely symbolical.

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