

# The Eastern Window

by Penny Farrow

**Editor's Note:** Cross ventilation produces a breath of fresh air. It is desirable in a house and even in a magazine! In this spirit, we are featuring a series of short articles designed to make some of the basic building blocks and ideas of Vedic astrology more accessible to all. We anticipate that opening the Eastern Window can clarify the complementarity between great astrological traditions.

## A Rose by Any Other Name

William Shakespeare and astrology? Of course! After all, he coined the term “star-crossed lovers” in his immortal *Romeo and Juliet*. In the play, Juliet famously asks: “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” As astrologers, perhaps we could paraphrase Juliet: “That which we call a chart in any other form would look as compelling” (and tell the same story). The trick is to see the unity behind the various names and forms, and realize “Oh, it’s still a rose” in this or that astrological tradition.

Western astrologers are often puzzled by the strikingly different way the sky pattern is represented in Vedic charts, which could limit their exploration of this tradition. However, the various “roses all smell as sweet,” once you become familiar with the different varieties.

Throughout the ages, charts in both traditions have been creatively rendered with lotus flowers, entwined animals, and the like. In India today, two visually distinct chart forms predominate — the North and South Indian formats. Once you understand the organizing principles behind these two forms, you will find it easy to relate them to the wheel chart, making them much more user-friendly. The goal is to be trilingual, even though it is only natural to be most at home with your mother tongue.

The figures depict the sidereal chart of President Barack Obama in the three formats. Each gives the same basic information. The sky pattern is divided into the twelve directions — four cardinal and eight intermediate directions called *bhavas* (houses). A particular *rashi* (zodiacal sign) is visible in each of the twelve directions at the time and place of a birth or event, and the *grahas* (planets) transiting through those signs are placed in the appropriate direction.

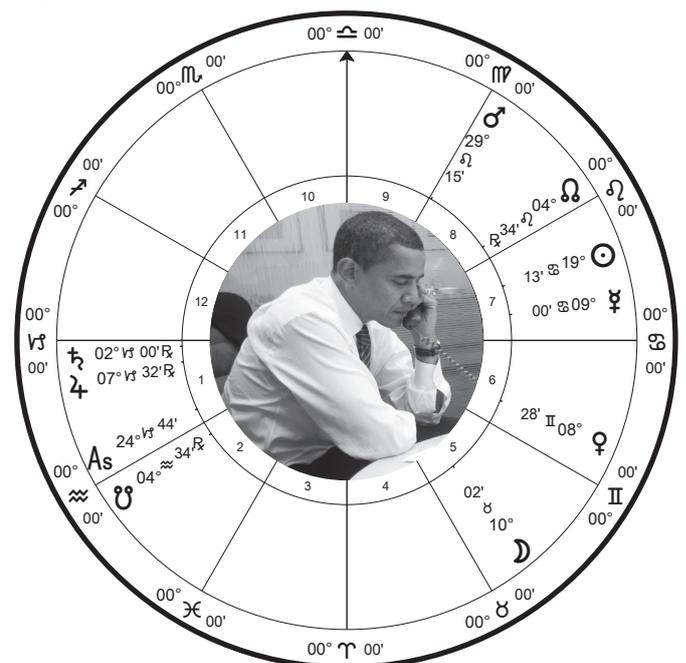
**Figure 1** (at right) shows Obama’s sidereal chart in the Western wheel style. **Figure 2** (facing page) is the North Indian chart. Picture yourself lying in bed looking up at your ceiling, which has magically transformed into a huge window

with twelve window panes — four large diamonds in the center (the cardinal directions) and eight triangles surrounding them (the intermediate directions). The window is looking out at the cosmic sphere, flattened so you can see both above and below the horizon.

The grid created by the window panes functions as a mapping tool, with the eastern horizon indicated by the top diamond where the rising degree and the abbreviation AS for Ascendant appear. You can think of this as the wheel chart rotated clockwise 90° so that east is at the top. East is the first direction (house), and the remaining directions (houses) are numbered counter-clockwise.

But why is the number 10 designated in Obama’s 1st house? The simple answer is that 10 is not the house number. Vedic astrologers using this format don’t need to see the house numbers. They know that the top diamond is east (1st house), and it is fairly obvious that the remaining diamonds are the other angles — 4th house (north), 7th house (west), and 10th house (south). The intermediate houses follow suit. With a little practice, it becomes like ABC.

**Figure 1: Barack Obama’s Western chart (sidereal)**



All charts use the Lahiri ayanamsha and the Mean Node.

So, what does that number 10 represent? Numbers are used in lieu of glyphs to represent the signs and correspond to the Western numbering system. Therefore, Obama is a Capricorn rising — a *cara* or moveable rashi (which is equivalent to a cardinal sign in Western astrology). Moving counterclockwise, the sign of his 4th house is Aries (1) — the first sign of the zodiac, the 7th house is Cancer (4), and the 10th house is Libra (7). If you have understood this, you will now see that Obama's Moon is in the 5th house in the sign of Taurus.

The South Indian chart (Figure 3, below right) reminds me of a Monopoly board with four squares per side instead of ten. Each of the twelve signs is specifically and permanently located in one of the squares. The easiest way to remember the layout is that the *divsuabhava* (mutable) signs are on the four corners: Gemini in the northeast, Virgo in the southwest, Sagittarius in the southwest, and Pisces in the northwest. Knowing this, it is simple to fill in the other signs visually.

The Ascendant is usually depicted as a diagonal line through the rising sign square or across one of its corners. Though some programs have an option to insert the house numbers, it is not necessary. Once the Ascendant is established, you simply count from there. So, the only obligatory chart markings are the Ascendant and placement of the planets in their appropriate houses. Most of us would appreciate knowing the degrees of the rising sign and planets, but you might be surprised to learn that some traditional Jyotishis work with only the barest of charts — no degrees!

In Obama's chart, the Ascendant (1st house) is Capricorn just above the southwest corner (Sagittarius). From there, you count clockwise to figure out the houses. In this example, note that Obama's 5th house falls in the sign of Taurus and is occupied by the Moon.

Let's contrast these two formats. The North Indian chart (Figure 2) looks dynamic and active with all the crisscrossing

lines. The directions (houses) are fixed and pop out at you, even though their numbers are not displayed. The rising sign is designated by its appropriate number appearing in the top diamond along with the rising degree.

The South Indian chart (Figure 3) feels calmer. The signs are fixed and the house numbers are usually absent, making it clean and simple. You need only count from the rising sign, which is clearly marked and contains the rising degree.

Practice makes perfect, so here is some homework. Look at the two Indian charts and see whether you can identify the signs and houses for Obama's planets in each format. Then take your own chart and try to draw the corresponding North and South Indian charts. By taking the time to "smell all the roses," you will soon be empowered to navigate any of these formats with your own internal GPS.

### Chart Data and Source

**Barack Obama**, August 4, 1961; 7:24 p.m. AHST; Honolulu, HI, USA (21°N18', 157°W52'); AA: birth certificate.

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Figure 2: Barack Obama, North Indian chart

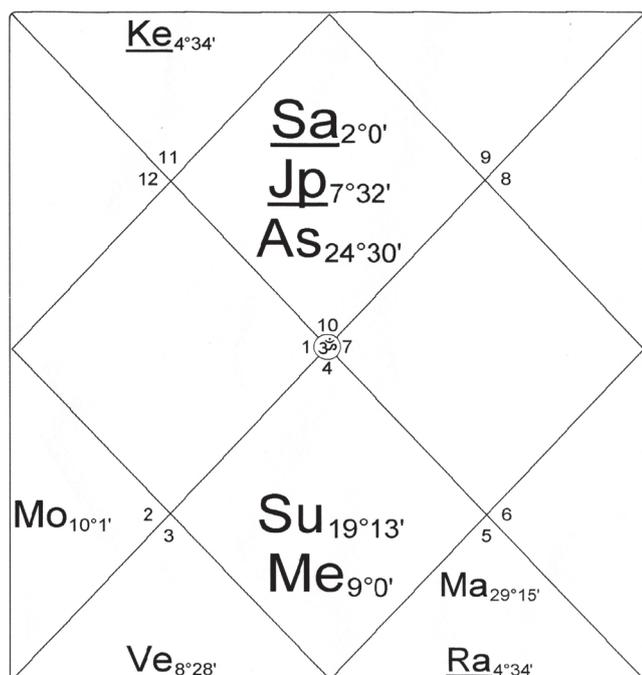


Figure 3: Barack Obama, South Indian chart

