

# 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 Well-Appointed Sky

Major events in life like weddings, inaugurations, family reunions, etc., are meticulously and even professionally planned. Great care is taken in choosing a venue, color schemes, and even dress codes. It would be quite jarring if someone turned up at a black-tie event at the Waldorf in shorts and a halter top, and it would be unseemly to hold a Golden Anniversary party in a hall located next to a cemetery or a garbage dump.

Still, it is common practice to plan an event in a place and at a time when the cosmos is very poorly dressed for the occasion, though this does not seem to be factored in at all. Most people don't take into account the environs of the event beyond the local conditions of the venue.

This is all the more perplexing when we consider that the very fabric of our life depends on observation of the cosmos. We would be in complete chaos were it not for the device we call a calendar. Our life is organized around the calendric marking of years, months, days, and hours. Whether it is hanging on your wall or embedded in your

devices, the calendar is king and, in ancient times, was worshipped.

In Vedic India, the calendric function was part of the duties of the astrologer, who was an expert in astronomical observation (*gola*) and calculations (*ganita*). Indeed, modern-day astronomers cannot fathom how these ancient seers could possibly be so accurate in their reckoning of the distances between planets, the orbits of the planets, the timing of eclipses, etc. Specific texts deal with largely astronomical data; they are called *Siddhantas*, the most famous being the *Surya Siddhanta*.

The calendar that was and still is utilized in India is called the *Panchanga*, which translates as “five limbs.” There are a myriad of regional variations, but a common thread is that there are five major measurements of time that are calculated based on soli-lunar considerations.

The first is the day of the week, known as *Vara*. This is a strictly solar

consideration. The second is the lunar constellation or *nakshatra* that the Moon is passing through on a given day, a strictly lunar consideration.

The third is the lunar day or *tithi*, of which there are 30. This is the calculation of the elongation of the Moon from the Sun (the waxing and waning cycle of the Moon) and is thus a soli-lunar consideration. The fourth limb, known as *Karana*, involves dividing the *tithi* into two halves and is also a soli-lunar consideration. The fifth and final limb is a unique calculation involving the longitudes of the Sun and the Moon, which results in 27 *Nitya Yogas* — combinations that indicate auspicious or inauspicious results and last approximately 24 hours each.

Calculation and comprehension of the permutations of the limbs of the *Panchanga* made *Jyotisha* fundamental to the Vedic tradition. Historically, it was not initially about predicting events in the lives of average individuals, but rather its central role was to set the right time for religious holidays, important rituals, and endeavors that maintained the integrity of society and the success of the *rajās* or kings. Hence, it became known as the “Eyes of the Veda.”

In modern times, the limb of *Jyotisha* that is used analogously to the Western technique of electional astrology is called *muhurta*. *Muhurta* is a unit of time corresponding to 48 minutes. Therefore, 30 *muhurtas* correspond to our 24-hour day. In an idealized day where both day and night are equal, the 15 daylight and 15 nighttime *muhurtas*

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are equal in length. When the days vary in length, the duration of the muhurta is adjusted accordingly. Thus, on a given day, a muhurta can be longer or shorter than 48 minutes.

If this sounds rather ornate, it is! It is in fact this very ornateness that distinguishes muhurta from other systems. Muhurta requires that the eternal dance between the Sun and the Moon, as seen through the lens of the five limbs of the Panchanga, be auspicious and appropriate for the day, time, and nature of the event.

However, a sky pattern that is auspicious in a general sense is only half the story of a good muhurta. The other major piece is the link between the proposed sky pattern and the chart of the individual who is marrying, starting a new job, buying a house, etc.

The principal technique for achieving this link is an auspicious alignment of the muhurta Moon to the natal Moon, according to prescribed formulas. The Moon represents the *manas* (the primal mind) and indicates the itch or desire

to get something done. Clarifying that desire through the effort and patience it can take to utilize an auspicious cosmic pattern strengthens the intention of the client and perfects the initiation of the event.

Linking the will of the person to the proposed time is also very important and requires consideration of the birth chart Ascendant, the muhurta Ascendant, and the muhurta Moon. These are all essential ingredients in choosing a proper time.

Many astrologers throw up their hands and back away from attempting what seems like a formidable task. But like everything else, electing an auspicious time is about the art of compromise. There is a famous story of a sage who wished to marry, found the right partner, and wanted a good muhurta for the marriage ceremony. He turned away all the times that were being offered. Eight hundred years later, he got his well-appointed sky, but by then he had run out of all the eligible women!

Next time, we will look in more detail at one of the limbs of the Panchanga — the enticing nakshatras.

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