

THE EASTERN WINDOW

by Penny Farrow



THE TRICKY TWISTIES: THE GATIS OF RETROGRESSION

At the Olympics, Simone Biles, widely hailed as gymnastics' GOAT, experienced what gymnasts call “the twisties”—a disconcerting and disconnecting mid-aerial disorientation associated primarily with twisting rotational motion. Having lost their sense of where they are in the air, they become unable to safely land their usual aerial stunts. In time, the twisties abate and the gymnast typically begins to feel more settled and grounded, getting back into the usual swing of things. This is “the twisties.”

The ancient adage, “as above so below,” might well apply to an analogous phenomenon experienced by the *tara grahas*, the five true planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn). They get the twisties. As if uncertain where they are in their path, their average daily pace slows down, becoming slower and slower until they appear to stop in their tracks. Instead of figuring it all out as they stand still, they proceed to lose it entirely and start to go backward. Then they pick up steam and chug along in reverse gear until some kind of realization — that this is not normal — kicks in. They slow down once more, come to a halt, regroup, and turn back around, moving forward again. In due course, they speed up until they are back to their familiar selves.

Five different gaits (*gati*) of the grahas as they move forward along the ecliptic were discussed in the last two columns of “The Eastern Window.” The most dramatic gatis, however, are the remaining three — the twisties.

The most well-known of the twisties is retrogression, the *gati* known as *vakra*. Even those who know very little about astrology often feel unsettled about the idea of planets moving backward. Do they actually move backward? No, not really. Retrogression is an artifact for observers on planet Earth because it too is moving, resulting in complex geometry that gives rise to an illusion of reversed motion.¹

Unlike our gymnast, the pattern of a graha's case of the twisties is predictable. At some point in its cycle, the graha slows down in its forward movement — *manda* (slow) and *mandatarā* (very slow) *gati*. When it is standing nearly still, the *gati* is known as stationary direct in Western astrology and *vikala* or *kutīla* in Jyotisha. The length of time the graha

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.

seems to have no movement varies among the five, with Saturn, the slowest, spending the most time in that unusual state. Then the graha starts moving backward (*vakra gati*). It gradually speeds up in this reverse motion, but achieves only about half of its maximum forward motion velocity. Eventually it will start to slow down again, coming back to *vikala*, after which it resumes its forward motion.

Mercury, with the shortest orbit, moves through its retrograde cycle the quickest, spending around 24 days in between the *vikala gatis* that bookend the *vakra* portion. Seems like Mercury can hardly stand still, as its apparent stationary phase is barely one day and it repeats this cycle on an average of three times a year! It's no wonder that it is regarded as the Winged Messenger and has meanings like “fickle” and “changeable.” On the other hand, Saturn creeps through its retrograde cycle that lasts on the order of 140 days, with the bookending *vikala gatis* about five days each.

Another *gati* called *anuvakra* is a less frequent specific case of the retrograde pattern. The retrogression starts in one *rashi* (sign), and the retrograde graha moves backward into the previous *rashi*, slowing down there until it is *vikala* (standing still) before turning around, resuming its direct (forward) motion, and crossing the *rashi* boundary again into the original *rashi*. This can be especially intense, as the graha involved is no longer confined to one *bhava* in the chart and is therefore spreading its influence more widely.

It is not surprising that grahas that are *vakra* are described as tortuous, twisted, crooked, and bent. The *Figure* (facing page) traces the big S-curve that Mars inscribes as it goes through its retrograde cycle between July 2020 and February 2021.² However, most of the pop culture around retrogressions misses some additional points that are very important both in the interpretation and the power of a retrograde graha. It turns out that when a graha is retrograde, it is also closest to the Earth in its orbit. Therefore, through most of the retrograde period, it is brighter than at any other time in its cycle. Brightness correlates with manifestation.

Contrary to some common beliefs that these retrograde grahas imply an inward imploding of whatever matter they may indicate in the chart, they can give powerful results. However, *what* do they manifest? It might be the deviating, crooked, tortuous, and meandering character of themes that the graha is bringing forward in a chart. But it can also give deep focus, since the graha takes three passes over a particular area of a chart — going forward, then retrograding back over that area, then forward again. That motion can

result in fine distinctions and subtleties while still retaining a unique or eccentric spin to things. Depending on the context of a chart, a retrograde graha can tilt towards being inauspicious, cruel, and even fraudulent — remember that retrogression is not real.

Vikala (kutila) gati deserves a column on its own. It represents the morning and evening stations, when the planets are starting or ending the most visible times in their cycle. The ancients used these points for understanding and tracking planetary motion. There are common descriptions of both of these terms and some distinctions. We can

to a whopping three times its usual speed (reckless driving), leveling around February 9, 2021, but sustaining that speed through mid-April 2021. Hmm, anything consequential happening from May 2020 to February 2021? How about an election, another impeachment, an out-of-control pandemic, and a riot at the Capitol? As both Biden and Trump are running Jupiter dashas, these transits are hugely consequential. Yes, one won and one lost, yet the antics of the tricky twisters are on full display.

In the summer of 2021, Jupiter in Aquarius began a similar retrograde cycle, moving back into Capricorn, its



Figure: Path of Mars as measured against the night sky July 2020 – February 2021

characterize vikala as a graha freezing on the spot through uncertainty, alarm, fright, or deprivation. However, because the graha is at a standstill, it can, in some contexts, imply a pulling together, an ability to clarify, reflect, or deliberate with a calm center. Kutila has additional connotations that are very colorful, such as having a magic power. It is kind of magical to just hang there without apparent motion. There is also something elusive and compelling. It is furthermore said to be insightful and clever, but that can turn to cunning and corrupt, depending on the disposition of the chart.

Finally, there is anuvakra gati, which, as mentioned above, is an intensification of the meanings of vakra and vikala with border crossings and all that implies. Two examples of anuvakra gati, both involving Jupiter, happened recently. On May 14, 2020, Jupiter was in Capricorn vikala gati and turning retrograde. On June 29, it went into Sagittarius while in retrograde motion (anuvakra). It was vikala on September 12, turning toward forward motion. It accelerated uncharacteristically quickly and crossed back into Capricorn on November 20, when it continued to speed up

rashi of debilitation, on September 14. As of this writing (September 2021), it has not yet finished this cycle, but after it turns direct in mid-October, it will repeat the same kind of acceleration as in 2020 as it moves into Aquarius on November 20 and ramps up to maximum speed into the first quarter of 2022. This pattern is notable in similar ways to the dramatic autumn and winter of 2020–21 and already there has been the abrupt and controversial end of the war in Afghanistan, the Delta variant of COVID-19 engendering mask and vaccine wars, hurricanes, fires, and the further rending of the country with respect to voting rights and the ever-present great divide between pro-choice/pro-life. Fasten your seat belts.

References and Notes

1. <https://vedicchart.com/cosmic-kaleidoscope-journal/going-retro/> (accessed in August 2021)
2. Ibid.; the Figure is courtesy of Diego Iglesias.

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Penny Farrow has an M.S. degree from Cornell University and has had an extensive career as a teacher, researcher, and businesswoman. She has been involved in the Vedic tradition since 1971. She has studied Jyotisha intensively since 1991, primarily under the personal tutelage of Hart deFouw and taught Jyotisha and Sanskrit at Vedic

Vidya Institute in San Rafael, California for eight years. She now resides in Florida, practicing and teaching Jyotisha and Sanskrit full-time, including a new online option. Telephone: (415) 497-2014; email: info@vedicchart.com; website: <http://www.vedicchart.com>

