



27 STARS, 27 GODS

THE ASTROLOGICAL MYTHOLOGY
OF ANCIENT INDIA

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27 Gods

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of Ancient India

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Introduction

Look up at the night sky; countless stars will delight and fascinate you! The most beautiful object in the nighttime sky has got to be the Moon. It particularly captivated the hearts and minds of ancient Indians – who watched it travel through the glistening circle of stars every 27 days.

So the Indians, like many other ancient cultures, developed 27 constellations. They conceived of these heavenly lights as repositories of the powers of the gods.

Indian astrology, often called “Vedic Astrology,” has become quite popular throughout the world today. The true heart of this astrology, its original core, is the 27 stars. To interpret their meaning, the most important thing to have is a deep and lucid understanding of the gods that empower them.

Before diving into this exciting topic, please allow me to address a few important misconceptions about the stars

The Stars are *not* the Signs

The most prevalent and long-standing misconception about the 27 stars is that they are permanently linked with certain zodiac signs.

The 12 zodiac signs are based on the movement of the Sun, which we measure by observing its solstices and equinoxes. The 27 constellations are based on the movement of the Moon, which we measure by observing it moving through the stars. These *different* ways of measuring space don’t stay aligned to one another: The solstice Sun, for example, drifts very slowly through the stars year by year. So, there is no *permanent* relationship between the stars and the signs.

Indians have known this since antiquity.

- Books written by them at different points in history acknowledge different stars as being the “first” by virtue of rising with the equinox.¹
- The Purāṇas note that the big dipper gradually changes its orientation to the horizon.²
- Surya Siddhānta explicitly states that the equinox moves in relation to the stars.³
- A clear distinction between stars and tropical signs is made throughout Sanskrit literature.⁴

Although the ancient Indians were well aware of the fundamental difference between signs and stars, most modern Indian astrologers are confused about it. Over the last several centuries they have fused the two, creating the misconception that the 12 signs are stellar, and that the 27 stars are some sort of secondary, awkward subdivision of them.

At least while you are reading this book, please try to forget this misconception, and whatever you might have learned about the 27 stars that explains them as if they were subdivisions of zodiac signs. Since there is no permanent relation between stars and signs, the meaning of the stars has nothing to do with the signs they temporarily coincide with.

¹ For example, the earliest Vedas, like Ṛg and Atharva were written when the Pleiades rose with the Sun on the vernal equinox and identify the Pleiades as the “first” star. Purāṇas written much later identify β Arietis as the “first” star because the vernal equinox had drifted to β Arietis when those books were written.

² For example, see Bhāgavatam 12.2.27-32.

³ 3.9-10.

⁴ For explicit non-stellar tropical definition of the 12 signs see Viṣṇu Purāṇa 2.8.26-30, Bhāgavata Purāṇa 5.21.2-6, Sūrya Siddhānta 14.7-10, and even perhaps Ṛg 1.164.43.

The Stars have no “Planetary Lords”

Another prevalent misconception is that the stars have “planetary lords” who play a role in forming the character of the star. This mistaken idea arises because Indian astrology associates the stars to specific planets when calculating astrological time phases (*nakṣatra-daśā*). But even then there is no *permanent* correlation between planets and stars because there are dozens of *nakṣatra-daśā* systems, and each one associates different planets with different stars.

At least for now, please forget any explanation of the 27 stars that talks about their “planetary lords.” The 27 Stars are ruled by gods, not by planets.

To Understand the Stars, You Must Understand the Gods

The easiest way to deeply and clearly understand the 27 Vedic stars is to deeply and clearly understand the Vedic gods that empower them. That is a big task, but if we let the name and symbol of each star focus our attention on specific aspects of the gods, we will in the course of a single small book be able to communicate a very effective and significant intimacy with these ancient stars.

Most of the book will familiarize you with the 27 gods of these stars, highlighting the astrological relevance of names, symbols and myths. After that, I will summarize in a concise format the practical astrological effect of each star.

The Beautiful Stallion ~ *Aśvini*



Name Aśvini

Meaning A beautiful stallion

Symbol A horse

Deity Aśvini Kumāra -
Twin gods of health

Main Stars Twin stars: β and γ Arietis



The horse is a symbol of beauty and health: both of which are instrumental in enjoying life. So, it is a perfect symbol to summarize the nature of Aśvinī.

I will tell you some tales about the gods of Aśvinī, highlighting their connection to the horse symbol.

Born from Horses

Viṣṇu Purāna (2.3):

The Sun's wife needs a break now and then. Her husband is hot – literally. So she regularly goes off to recuperate and build up her strength again to deal with his immense heat. She didn't want to depress or insult her husband so, being a goddess and no ordinary woman, she came up with the idea to make a clone of herself to take care of normal affairs in her absence. She hoped the Sun god would not even notice her absence.

Sūrya (the Sun god) already had three children with her: Manu (from whom came human beings), Yama (lord of death) and Yamī (the river Yamuna). Now, while his wife was away, he made three more children with her clone: Śani (the god of Saturn), a second Manu, and Tapatī (another river).

All was well and good until one day the clone-wife got really angry and cursed her "son" Yama. Sūrya realized, "This can't be Yama's mother. A mother would never curse her own son so harshly." Sūrya took the form of a horse and tracked his real wife to a forest where she was meditating for recuperation. She also took the form of a horse and tried to flee. Surya caught up to her and, as horses, they had a third batch of three children: The Aśvinī twins and a son named Revanta.

Mahābhārata Adi.66.35 adds that the twins were born from each nostril of their horse-mother.

So, the gods of Aśvinī were born from horses.

The Horse Head Loophole

Rg Veda (22.116):

Indra (king of the gods) knew a how to produce secret, powerful elixirs like Soma and did not want this knowledge to get into the wrong hands. He taught it to sage Dadichi but laid a curse upon him: “If you teach this to *anyone* your head must come off.”

The Aśvinī twins wanted to learn this secret! So, being master surgeons, they cut off the sage’s head and the head of a horse and swapped the two. Through “the horse’s mouth” they learned the secrets they sought. Then they swapped the heads back to their original owners. Thus they made a loophole which diffused the curse of Indra.

This illustrates that skill in surgery is a theme of Aśvinī.

Curing the Blindness of a Friend

Rg Veda (16.115):

Once, the divine horse that belonged to the Aśvinī twins took the shape of a wolf. One young man collected 100 goats from the locals and fed them to this wolf. The man’s father became very angry that his son stole from others, and cursed his son to become blind. The young man appealed to the Aśvinī twins, who were very sympathetic and cured his blindness.

This illustrates that Aśvinī’s medical expertise is particularly suited towards improving sensual acuity, “curing blindness.”

Curing a Blind Old Sage

Devī Bhāgavata (7) & Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (9.3):

A beautiful young princess named Sukanya once semi-unknowingly poked the eyes of an old hermit named Cyavana, making him blind. To apologize for the act, she married him and cared for him very faithfully and wonderfully.

One day the Aśvinī twins saw her alone, collecting various things from the deep forest where she lived with the hermit. They boldly proposed that she abandon the old blind man and take one of them as her new husband. She became very angry with them and said, “If you don’t shut up and get out of here, my curses will burn you to ashes!”

The twins were extremely impressed and proposed a new idea. “OK,” they said, “We will repair your husband’s blindness *and* we will make him completely youthful and handsome. How does that sound?”

It sounded very suspicious to her. “What’s the catch?” She asked.

“The catch is,” they answered, “once this is done you will not be able to visually distinguish him from us. And you will have to pick which one of the three of us is really your husband. Whomever you select will then be your husband from that moment on.”

She didn’t like the idea at all, but didn’t want her husband to miss the opportunity to regain his sight. So she took the twin gods home and explained the situation to her husband. “Oh, that’s fine. No problem,” her husband said with complete confidence. “Let’s do it immediately.”

So the twins took the hermit to a nearby lake and the three of them entered it. When they later emerged from the lake all three looked alike: glowingly youthful and handsome men with perfect eyesight. Praying to her goddess for protection the young princess easily selected her true husband from the look-alikes. The Aśvinī twins were quite pleased to witness the deep purity of this woman.

This story illustrates many themes of Aśvinī: medical marvels, health, beauty, vision, loyalty, and an appetite for enjoyment.

Curing a Blind Disciple

Mahābhārata (Adi.3.34-77):

A guru had a very plump disciple who tended to his cows. He asked, “My dear boy, why are you so fat?”

“I beg alms from the householders.”

“The student should beg on behalf of the guru, not on his own behalf. So give those alms to me,” the Guru said.

But several days later, the disciple was still fat. “Why are you still fat?” The Guru asked.

“After begging for you I again beg to get my meals,” the disciple explained.

“That is no good” said the guru. “You are making people give you all their food. How will *they* eat? Don’t do that anymore.”

Several days later the disciple was still fat. “Why are you *still* fat?”

“I milk the cows and drink,” said the disciple.

“Why? Those are my cows, not yours. Don’t do that anymore.”

But several days later the disciple was still fat. “Why?” asked the guru.

“When the calves drink, I drink what they spill.”

“Don’t do that,” replied the guru. “Calves are naturally sympathetic. They are spilling the milk on purpose for your sake and are going hungry themselves.”

Now the disciple was really getting hungry. He would grab some leaves from the trees and eat them. They were horrible and poisonous and made him go blind in a few days. With failing vision he fell painfully into a well. The guru found him there and said, “Just pray to the Aśvinī twins. They will cure your blindness.” Then he left.

The disciple did so. The twins appeared before him and said, “Eat this cake it will cure you.”

“I can’t eat what I get from others. I must give everything to my guru.”

“It’s OK,” explained the Aśvinī. “Your guru himself fell into the same situation as you and we cured him in this same manner. He did not offer the medicinal cake to his guru, he just ate it. You can follow his example.”

“No, no. I cannot. I will have to remain blind if I cannot give this bread to my guru.”

The Aśvinī were so impressed they blessed him, “Your blindness is cured! You will be always prosperous and happy. Your teeth will be pure gold, and your guru’s teeth will turn to iron.” It immediately came to pass.

The guru was very pleased to have broadcast the superexcellent dedication of his disciple (And it doesn’t seem like he was troubled much by his iron teeth, either.)

This illustrates the same themes as the previous two stories.

Miscellaneous

Mahābhārata (Droṇa.62.3): A male once became pregnant. Of course the baby could not be delivered normally. The Aśvinī twins performed a caesarean birth. This illustrates the power of Aśvinī to perform medical marvels.

Rg Veda (11.112) says that the Aśvinī can bring rain during a draught. Similarly Rg (9.16) says the Aśvinī dug a hole in the desert and it became a well. This is probably a glorification of the star to communicate the fact that many problems can be overcome by starting the effort when the Moon is in Aśvinī.

Worship of the Aśvinī Kumāra improves *beauty*.

Labor Pains ~ *Bharaṇī*



Name Bharaṇī

Meaning Bearing children

Symbol Vulva, downward-triangle

Deity Yama - god of death

Main Stars The dim triangle: 41, 39 and 25 Arietis.



The name Bharanī comes from the word *bharaṇa*, which means, “to maintain, bear, support.” The English phrase, “bearing children” or “labor pains” expresses it perfectly. The vulva is an excellent symbol for Bharanī because it symbolizes bearing children, which itself summarizes the main characteristic of this star: bringing new life into the world at the cost of great labor and pain.

It seems odd that the powers of Yama, the god of death, reside in the star which bears new life. This highlights the fact that life and death are inseparable and new life is impossible without the death of the old. As expressed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Bhagavad-Gītā (2.27):

*“Death is certain for one who is born.
Birth is certain for one who dies.”*

Life Needs Death

The fundamental character of Bharanī is that good things cannot come without difficulties. Illustrating this, Mahābhārata (Vana.142) tells a story of life being unable to continue without death. The story takes place in the “First Age” of history, during which time humans have extremely long lifespans. Yama, the god of death, therefore thought it would be OK to take a break for a while. But the population of the Earth quickly became too great and she could not support everyone. Overpopulation began to cause serious problems. The gods appealed to Viṣṇu, who took the form of a boar to lend strength to the earth. Yama came back to his duties (making sure people die) and the situation came back to normal.

In another section (Ādi.199), Mahābhārata tells a similar story. Yama once took the position of chief priest in a very long religious ritual, putting his duties as the god of death on hold for many, many years. Everything was getting out of balance in the world because no one was dying, so all the gods begged Yama to stop and go back to his normal duties. When he did, people started dying again and everything returned to normal.

*Death may not be pleasant, but it is good and important.
Bharaṇī is like that: it contains the sacrifices that must be made
to produce something worthwhile; difficulties must be endured
to produce something great.*

Death of Death

This next story illustrates a similar point. There are a few slightly different versions of it, this telling is found in Padma Purana:

Once upon a time, a young boy was told that he would die when he turned sixteen. Seeking protection from this fate, the boy sat in yogic meditation before a deity of Śiva. When he turned sixteen, the agents of Yama tried to take him, but could not approach him due to the power he had accumulated. Yama himself appeared personally with his noose. But when he threw the noose, the boy leapt upon and embraced his deity, crying for protection. The noose encircled both the boy and the deity, who became furious at what death appeared to be attempting. The deity sprang to life and burned the god of death to ashes.

All the gods appealed to Śiva to reconsider what he had just done. Without death, how would the world continue to function as it was intended by Viṣṇu? Accepting this, Śiva brought Yama back to life after granting the boy, Mārkeṇḍeya, an extremely long lifespan.

Like the boy, we also try to escape the challenges of Bharaṇī. But as the story goes his efforts caused more harm than good, creating a calamity that required extensive divine intervention and troubled all the gods. We are not supposed to avoid Bharaṇī. We are supposed to embrace it just as a mother must embrace labor contractions if she wishes to later embrace her beautiful child.

The boy meditated upon a famous mantra from Rg (7.59.12) and Yajur Veda, the mahā-mṛtyuṃ-jaya (“the great triumph over death”). This mantra can be effective for dealing with Bharaṇī if one chants it with the intention not to escape one’s difficulties, but to prosper from them:

Om
tryambakaṃ yajāmahe
sugandhiṃ puṣṭi-vardhanam
urvārukam iva bandhanān
mṛtyor mukṣīya māmṛtāt.

Escaping Bharaṇī

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (6.1-3) tells the story of a man who *did* escape the noose of Yama:

Once, there was a pious man who worshipped Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu), but whose mind got infected with base desires upon seeing lewd behavior. He soon abandoned his family and dedicated everything he had to a prostitute. Eventually they had a child, whom he named Nārāyaṇa. At the moment of his death, he saw the agents of Yama approaching and cried out for his son, “Nārāyaṇa!”

The agents of Viṣṇu arrived immediately and forbade the agents of Yama from taking the man. “A person able to fix their minds on God while they are dying does not require any additional corrections,” they declared. Yama himself agreed that this was true. The man was released and engaged in purifying deeds for the rest of his life before attaining liberation.

As illustrated here, the names of Viṣṇu help us deal productively with the labor pains of Bharaṇī, by making us more devotional and self-sacrificing. The man in this story was even more successful than the boy in the previous story. So the most efficacious mantra for dealing productively with Bharaṇī is one composed of Viṣṇu’s names. Kali Santarana Upanishad (an appendix to Yajur Veda) specifically recommends:

hare kṛṣṇa, hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa, hare hare
hare rāma, hare rāma, rāma rāma, hare hare

Restriction

Bharaṇī is like the child cramped within the womb: It is a difficult star of struggles and restrictions. Indeed, the name of the god of death, Yama, literally means *restriction / regulation*. Death is merely the ultimate regulation, the most inescapable restriction.

In Bhagavad-Gītā (10.29), Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:

yamaḥ saṁyamatām aham

“Among enforcers I am Yama.”

Bharaṇī represents difficulties we must face before we can prosper. It is a star of *yama*: limitation and restriction. To face such trials we must develop *yama*: self-control.

Note on Yama and Dharma

The god of death (Yama) and the god of morality (Dharma) are different beings, frequently confused to be one. It’s easy to see how this confusion would arise: Dharma (the god of morality) is also called Yama because morality requires self-control (*yama*). And the Yama (the god of death) is also called Dharma - because he judges people after death on the basis of their morality (*dharma*). Despite sharing names, however, they are different beings, and it is Yama, not Dharma, who empowers Bharaṇī.

The Sharp Blade ~ *Kṛttikā*



Name Kṛttikā

Meaning Cutter, divider

Symbol Sharp blades

Deity Agñi – god of fire

Main Stars The bright blue Pleiades



The word *ṛttikā* comes from the *ṛtta / kartati*, meaning “cut, divide.” Obviously the symbol of sharp blades is fitting. But the word is also related to the root *ṛt* which means “assemble, accomplish.” So the sharpness of *Ṛttikā* is not a barbarian blade! It is a careful tool of precise subdivision. Similarly, *Ṛttikā* is a star of insight, incisiveness, disassembly of complex things, and detailed comprehension.

Agñi, the god of fire, empowers *Ṛttikā*. Fire has two qualities: it is bright, and it is hot. Brightness illuminates. Heat burns, or “digests,” it liberates the energy within things. *Ṛttika* is not only incisive but “bright.” It is a star of intellectual, brilliant insights and the ability to quickly digest concepts and ideas. The English word “critical” likely comes from *ṛttikā*. It is a star of incisive, critical thought.

Ṛttikā is *not* a good star for anything requiring tenderness, but it is excellent for analysis, rapid and accurate assessment, and the ability to cut through problems and confusions.

The Sharp, Divided Child of Fire

To tell you this story, I will combine the versions given in [Mahābhārata](#) (Vana.223-227), [Vālmikī Rāmāyana](#) (Bālakāṇḍa.36) and [Brahmāṇḍa Purāna](#) (81):

Once, during a ritual, Agñi saw the wives of the seven sages and fell in love with them. He transformed into their household fire to clandestinely gaze upon their beauty. But eventually he reproached himself thoroughly and went off to the forest to lament his broken heart.

A goddess named Svāhā had been in love with Agñi for a long time, and saw this as her chance. She assumed the appearance of one of the sage’s wives and ran to Agñi, saying, “I am Śivā, the wife of Sage Angiras. I have come to fulfill all your desires.”

After their intercourse she transformed into a bird, and flew to a legendary mountain from which the sun rises. There she threw Agñi’s

semen into a lake. Then she assumed the form of the wife of a different sage and repeated the whole process five more times. She could not impersonate the seventh wife, Arundhati, due to the power of Arundhati's devotion to her husband Vasistha.

Meanwhile, an anti-god named Tāraka rose to power and conquered all the gods on the strength of a benediction that only a seven-day-old child could kill him.

The gods tried to have children, but because of a curse they could not. Not even Śiva and his wife Pārvatī could conceive, even after attempting for 100 celestial years! Their powerful efforts put the universe into distress and the gods requested that Śiva and Pārvatī desist. Śiva, however, was interrupted just in the process of discharging semen. He said, "You've infuriated my wife by this disruption! Now tell me, what womb shall bear my seed?"

The gods suggested that the Earth become the womb. This infuriated Pārvatī even further and she cursed the Earth to be unable to bear the child. Śiva's seed caused a great disturbance to the earth and there were floods and havoc. The gods requested powerful Agñi, the god of fire, to bear the seed – so he took it within the womb of flame. But he too fell under the angry curse of Pārvatī and could not develop the seed into a child. The effort exhausted him and fire began to dim and cool. Agñi approached the goddess Ganges, who said, "Put the seed into my waters." But she also faced failure and frustration until she learned that Angi's seed had been planted five times beside a lake on the Mountain of Sunrise. She added Śiva's to this.

The mountain soon produced gave birth to a ferociously powerful child, who began destroying the hillside and howling with a voice like thunder.

The seven sages attempted to remedy this terrible disturbance. The inhabitants of the forest told them that six of their wives were to blame. In anger, the sages divorced those six wives and sent them away. (They

cut off their wives, divorced them – the literal meaning of Kṛttikā is to cut off and separate).⁵

The child could not be pacified and even the gods dared not openly oppose him. Instead they sent the six divorced wives of the sages (the *Kṛttikas*) to tame the child and then kill him with poison on their breasts. But the women became compassionate towards the boy and accepted him as if he truly were their own son.

Since six women came to feed him, he split (“*kṛttika*”) into six forms to nurse from each mother simultaneously. He is known as Kārtikeya because he was nursed by the Kṛttika.

Pacified by these six mothers, the child then greeted his father Agñi.

Next arrived Śiva, Pārvatī, the Earth Goddess and Ganga. All of whom had valid claims to being his parent. The boy had six forms. One of them remained with the six Kṛttikas, another remained with Agñi, another went to Śiva, Pārvatī, Ganga, and to the Earth.

When the supernatural child was only seven days old, the gods put him in charge of their armies and attacked the anti-gods. The powerful newborn destroyed Tāraka and returned the balance of power to the gods.

Killing Children

Mahābhārata (Vana.230):

Agñi’s child told his six mothers, “Until I am sixteen years old, I will be an evil spirit killing children, slicing them up and eating them.”

It is well known that warfare kills children and deprives them of their parents. Fire, which creates acidity in organisms, also

⁵ The seven stars of the Big Dipper represent the seven sages. The six main stars of the *Pleiades* are their six divorced wives – unfortunate goddesses. The seventh wife, Arundhati remains near her husband Vasiṣṭha as the star *Alcor* very close to *Mizar*.

diminishes fertility. Thus Kṛttikā is inauspicious for children and childbirth; as it is for all things that require gentleness and softness.

The Story of Śibi

This story from Mahābhārata (Vana.131) involves Agñi, and slicing, and is a great tale, so I will tell it here, in spite of the fact that it may not be entirely relevant to the astrological nature of Kṛttikā:

A King named Śibi was the most generous and charitable person in history. Indra and Agñi wanted to demonstrate the extent of his willingness for self-sacrifice so Angi became a dove and flew onto the king's lap while Indra became a hawk who tried to swoop down to eat the dove.

The king drove off the hawk, who then protested, "Why have you stolen my food?"

The king replied, "The dove has taken shelter of me, so I must protect it. Since you are hungry, I will feed you something else."

But the hawk would not accept anything in exchange for the dove. Śibi even offered his entire kingdom to the hawk, to no avail. Finally, the hawk accepted an amount of Śibi's own flesh equal to the weight of the dove.

When Śibi placed the dove and a piece of his thigh on a scale, the dove was heavier. Again and again he would slice off his flesh, but no matter how much he added, the dove was always heavier. When the terribly wounded king was about to put his entire body onto the scale, Agñi and Indra took their original forms, blessed him and brought him into paradise.

The Blushing Bride ~ *Rohiṇī*



- Name** Rohiṇī
- Meaning** A rosy, blushing lady
- Symbol** Bull pulling a cart of abundant produce;
Banyan tree
- Deity** Brahmā – forefather and creator
- Main Star** The red star: Aldebaran



Everything about this star symbolizes *fertile creativity*.

- The name *Rohiṇī* means, “red-girl.” That literally means a girl who is fertile, having entered puberty and begun her menstruation. Or you can take it as a “blushing bride.” Either way, *Rohiṇī* means “procreation”, and procreation means *creativity and fertility*.
- Rohiṇī’s symbol, a bull, is a symbol of male fertility. The bull pulls a cart overflowing with produce; another symbol of fertility.
- Rohiṇī’s other symbol, a tree, is a symbol of fertility because trees produce fruit, which are symbolic of children. The specific tree that symbolizes Rohiṇī is the Banyan, which is a particular symbol for fertility and growth because the Banyan tree never stops growing and expanding.
- Rohiṇī’s deity, Brahmā, is the father of all creatures, the original progenitor, and is therefore a symbol of fertility. Brahmā is also the creator of everything in the universe, and thus a symbol of creativity.

Rohiṇī is most certainly **the** star of fertility & creativity, accompanied by passion and beauty.

Let’s explore who Brahmā is and hear some stories connected with him, to better appreciate the fertile creative energy and passion within his star, Rohiṇī.

The God of Creativity

Hinduism is often portrayed to Christianized audiences as having a concept of “trinity” because Indian thought conceives of the world as being composed of *three* basic forces. In truth, however, the Indian concept is less like the Christian trinity and more like modern color theory, which states that three primary colors combine in various ratios to create an infinite spectrum.

The three primary forces are *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*.

Sattva = clarity, light, balance, peace

Rajas = redness, passion, desire, action

Tamas = shadow, darkness, stability, sleep

These three forces cause three essential universal events: maintenance, creation, and destruction. Three extremely powerful beings command the three forces and therefore the three universal events. Viṣṇu keeps things existing by commanding the force of clarity, *sattva*. Brahmā creates things by commanding the reddening force, *rajas*. Śiva destroys things by commanding the force of shadow, *tamas*.

Brahmā is the deity of the reddening power of creation and passion, *rajas*. So he is naturally the deity of the red star Rohiṇī. Rohiṇī is a star of rajas: fertility, passion, motivation, and creative powers of all sorts.

Tale of Creation

Vedic literature gives us a few different angles on the birth of Brahmā and how he created the world.⁶ I will incorporate all these as I present you the Purāṇic tale of creation:

Before all else, there is consciousness. It is full of inherent joy and bliss.

Joy is not stagnant. By nature it is ever-amplifying. Amplification implies an original signal and a distinct entity to amplify that signal. Plurality is therefore inherent in the original singular consciousness. Since joy does not thrive in loneliness, an infinite number of beings eternally center around the original consciousness.

Those infinite beings possess freewill, and are free to be non-cooperative with this scenario. Therefore a mirror image of reality exists,

⁶ **Manusmṛti** chapter one and **Vāmana Purāṇa** chapter 43 use the metaphor of an “egg” within an ocean. **Vedānta Sūtra** adds philosophical dimension to the tale. **Brahmā Saṁhita** also adds details. The **Bhāgavata Purāṇa** gives context to them all in its 1.3, 2.4-5, and 3.8.

where the centrality of the original consciousness is hidden in “darkness”, and the peripheral spark of freewill can imagine herself to be central.

Into this darkness the original consciousness expands as Puruṣa, the original Viṣṇu. Puruṣa reclines there on “the ocean of causes and possibilities.” While partially submerged in the waters an infinite number of bubbles exhale from the pores of his body. Some tales portray these bubbles as “eggs,” specifically as golden eggs. This is because an egg is circular and contains within it the materials and energies required to create something new. The egg is golden because it glows with conscious power, being a radiation from the divine all-conscious body of the Puruṣa. These bubble-eggs are the proto-solar-systems floating in the vast ocean of causality, space.

Eggs require seeds before they create anything. Therefore the Puruṣa penetrates into each of them. Within each egg he again reclines on a “cosmic ocean.” While partially submerged in this ocean, some of its water collects in his naval, in which a “lotus flower” grows.

Flowers reproduce asexually, and are therefore a fitting vehicle through which to deliver the very first being into the world.⁷ When the flower at the top of that lotus opened its petals, the god of creation Brahmā sat upon its central whorl.

At first Brahmā did not know who he was, what he was supposed to do, or how he was supposed to do it. He climbed down the stem of the lotus but couldn’t find its end. He looked around in all other directions and thus developed five heads (east, west, north, south, and up) – later

⁷ Because Brahmā was born asexually he is called *Aja*, “unborn” or “without conventional birth.”

Śiva removed one of these.⁸ Yet Brahmā could find no clue to answer any of his questions.

Then the Puruṣa spoke a single word, which Brahmā heard as a voice from the vastness of space: “*tapa.*” This was an instruction to Brahmā, “Be still. Control yourself. Be humble. Then you will understand.”

Brahmā practiced stillness and self-control, and as a result his mind became *receptive* to a full transmission of knowledge from Viṣṇu. In that transmission he received everything he needed to know, including the blueprint of how to use the primordial energies available within the “egg” to assemble all the various forms and creations of the universe.

Before Brahmā, there was nothing but what we might call subatomic quanta. Everything which now exists is a creation of Brahmā or a subsequent creation of his creation.

Let’s stop for a moment to consider how immensely **creative** Brahmā must be. He is the creator of the entire universe, the most creative being in it! Perhaps now we can appreciate how his star, Rohiṇī, abounds in creative power.

The Original Father

Brahmā was born before anyone else, and *everyone* else was born from him (with very few exceptions). Thus an often used name for Brahmā is Prajāpati, the original “progenitor.” Brahmā created many other prajāpati to help him populate the world, but when Prajāpati is used in a singular, specific manner it refers specifically to Brahmā.

Brahmā created many beings directly from his thoughts, so we should know that his star, Rohiṇī, is imaginative and full of creative thoughts and ideas. Brahmā also creates in a more conventional manner, so we should know that Rohiṇī has strong procreative and romantic passions.

⁸ Some say that Śiva keeps the fifth skull as a bowl, others say that he threw it into space and it landed in Mṛgaśīrṣā. I tell the story in a little more detail in the chapter on Ārdrā.

Brahmā Marries His Daughter

Regarding more conventional procreation, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (3.12) tells a story too interesting not to mention. For Brahmā to reproduce sexually he *must* first create his own wife. So, in a sense, his wife *must* be his “daughter”.

Her name is Vāk (the power of speech, another name for Sārasvatī, the goddess of learning), and she was not at all into the idea. When Brahmā began pressuring her, his other children stopped him in protest. Ashamed of himself, Brahmā abandoned his body and created a new one, to wash off the impurity of his thoughts. The old body turned into a dangerous fog in the darkness.

Later on Vāk agreed to marry Brahmā, seeing his predicament, but the two are not a happy couple and live at a distance from one another.

Father of Śiva

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (3.12) describes Śiva as the child of Brahmā.

Brahmā became furious that his quadruplet sons refused to take up the important duty of procreation, in favor of pursuing celibacy for spiritual reasons. From between his furrowed eyebrows, Brahmā’s anger sprang forth personified as Rudra, who later became known as Śiva.

I will tell you this story in more detail when we come to Rudra’s star, Ārdrā.

Viṣṇu is the first god because he controls the power of *sattva*, the energy of existence itself. Existence cannot manifest itself, however, without creation – so from Viṣṇu comes the god of creativity (*rajas*), Brahmā. However, whatever is created must be destroyed, and without destruction (*tamas*) there is no room for creation. Thus *rajas* always invokes *tamas* – and therefore the god of *tamas* (Śiva) emerges from the god of *rajas* (Brahmā).

Although Rohiṇī is a beautiful and pleasant star, it, like Brahmā also has a brief but hot temper when frustrated.⁹

⁹ In classical times Rohiṇī coincided with a significant portion of Taurus. I feel this is why this type of hot temper is associated with Taurus in classical astrology, even though nothing about Taurus' ruler (Venus), element (Earth), or mode (Fixed) lends itself much towards anger or hot tempers.

The Quest ~ *Mṛgaśīrṣā*



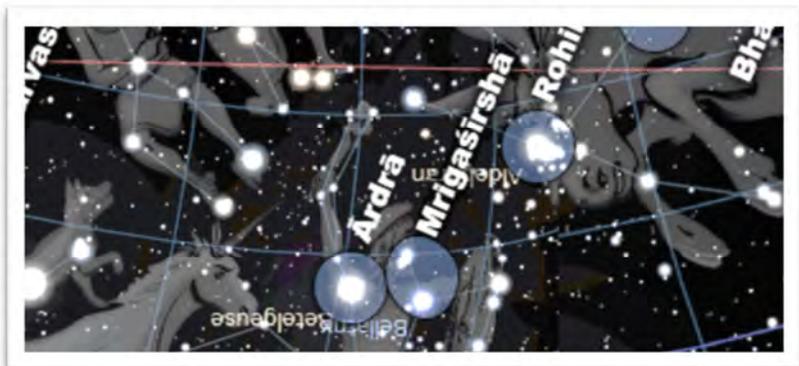
Name Mṛgaśīrṣā

Meaning Deer-faced

Symbol Deer sniffing the ground

Deity Soma - god of immortal nectar

Main Stars The head of Orion: λ , ϕ Orionis



Mṛga means a forest animal, especially deer. These animals are so named because they constantly roam in search of food; matching the literal meaning of the word: “searcher.”

Mṛgaśīrṣā’s symbol – a deer sniffing the ground – is essentially a literal depiction of the word Mṛgaśīrṣā (“Deer’s face”).

Soma is the deity of Mṛgaśīrṣā. Soma comes up in Bhagavad-Gītā (15.13), when Śrī Kṛṣṇa says,

puṣṇāmi cauśadhīḥ sarvāḥ somo bhūtvā rasātmakaḥ

“I become Soma and make plants delicious and nourishing.”

Soma is the god of a legendary elixir (also named Soma) that grants eternal youth and unsurpassed delight. I think it is simplest to describe Soma as the “fountain of youth.” This ties in nicely with the nature of Mṛgaśīrṣā to inspire quests and searches.

Literally, the word *soma* means “juice, sap, liquid.” Specifically, it is the liquid within plants that makes them nourishing and delicious.

Nourishment keeps us young, deliciousness delights us; so all food is a type of Soma. The legendary elixir is simply the ultimate form of food.

Vedic lore singles out one plant with the name *soma-vallī*, for it excels all others in nutrition and flavor. It is now extinct, but they say that millennia ago it grew in a few specific areas,¹⁰ and its leaves blossomed and withered with the waxing and waning Moon. By pressing the juice from its stalks one could make a beverage called Soma or Amṛta – the “nectar of immortality,” which the gods copiously drink to become powerful and impossible to kill.

¹⁰ **Rg** 8.7.29 & 8.64.10-11 say it grew in “Sushoma, Arjikiya, etc.” and in “Sharanyavat” (which is probably the shore of a specific lake) and on the slopes of Mt. Mūjavat. It is said to have a long, grassy-colored stalk and a green brilliance (**Rg** 9.42.1 & 9.61.17).

All vegetable-food carries the power of life in it. So in a sense, all food is *amṛta*. If we don't eat, we die (*mṛta*). If we eat, we don't die (*a-mṛta*). All food makes us "immortal" because it counteracts mortality. But the elixir made from the Soma plant is a super-food of legendary power. Humans and gods alike from all ages and cultures eternally search for it, like deer sniffing out its trail.

The deer of Mṛgaśīrṣā sniffs the ground in search of Soma in healthy and delicious herbs, but the human spirit sniffs at the paths of life in search of Soma in the form of eternity and bliss.

Mṛgaśīrṣā is all about *searching*.

Soma, Amṛta, Rasa

I mentioned that foods, among which Soma is the emperor, have two qualities: they keep us alive, and give us pleasure. R̥g Veda (9), a section entirely dedicated to Soma, confirms this, saying that Soma (1) gives immortality, and (2) "roars".

Soma is also called Amṛta ("immortality") because it counteracts mortality, food keeps us alive. R̥g 9.42 goes so far to call Soma the "immortality of the immortals" and the "godhood within the gods."

The second quality of Soma, however, is even more interesting. Sure, staying alive is important, but what is the point of living? R̥g 9 presents Soma to us as an answer: the point of living is to enjoy, to "roar," to revel and enjoy; to taste *rasa* – ecstatic joy. Thus another synonym for Soma is *Rasa*.

Taittiriya Upanishad (Ananda.7) speaks of *rasa*:

raso vai saḥ
rasam hy evāyam labdhvānandī bhavati

"He is certainly *rasa* itself!

Attain his *rasa* and become undoubtedly intoxicated with bliss!"

Directly or indirectly, consciously or not, we are all on a quest seeking *rasa*. Our ambition may be smashed into a lower, smaller shape by the hammer of repeated failure, but *rasa* is the real thirst behind every desire. Mṛgaśīrṣā involves all permutations of the search for *rasa*, not merely base and simple fun-seeking. After all, a deer is a beautiful and graceful creature, not a brute.

Rasa is the highest objective of Mṛgaśīrṣā. The Upanishad tells us that we will not find *rasa* in its fullest form in any fruit or vegetable, nor even in any paradisiacal elixir. We find it in *sah* - the All-Attractive Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is *rasa* personified.

Siblings in the Stars

Mahābhārata (Vana.221.15) tells us that Soma's brother is Agñi, and his sister is Rohiṇī. This has significant astrological import. The two brothers, Soma and Agñi stand on both sides of their sister. To one side of Rohiṇī is Soma's star, Mṛgaśīrṣā. To the other side is Agñi's star, Kṛttikā.

Agñi is the solar principle, fire. Soma is the lunar principle, water. Life thrives best when heat and moisture combine. Rohiṇī, between the heat of Agñi and moisture of Soma, is therefore the most abundant and fertile location among the 27 stars.¹¹

¹¹ This is similar to the famous "Juggernaut" deities of Orissa: Like Rohiṇī, the golden sister, Subhadrā, is protected on both sides by her brothers. On her right is Bāladeva, bright like the sunlit day (similar to Agni). On her left is Jagannātha, dark like the moonlit night (similar to Soma).

The Storm ~ *Ārdrā*



Name Ārdrā

Meaning Soaked

Symbol Storms; Raindrops

Deity Rudra - god of storms

Main Star Betelgeuse



The word *ārdṛā* literally means “wet.” Wet things symbolize Ārdṛā: teardrops, raindrops, and especially storms. Rudra, the howling god of destructive storms, is Ārdṛā’s deity.

What is a Storm? It is frightening, terrible and destructive, but it is nature’s way of replenishing the clean oxygen and protective ozone in the atmosphere.

Ārdṛā is the storm that we must weather so that our nature can once again become pure and clean.

Śankara-ācārya, an incarnation of Rudra, was born when the Moon was in Ārdṛā. The next great philosopher of India, Rāmānujā-ācārya, who corrected and built upon the foundations laid by Śankara, was also born with the moon in Ārdṛā.

Clearly, this star is a spiritually fertile domain.

The Creator and Destroyer Fight

The Skanda Purāṇa says that Brahmā once had an argument with Rudra, during which Rudra decapitated one of Brahmā’s heads (originally he had five). Rudra threw the head into space, and it became the stars of Mṛgaśīrṣā, the nakṣatra which comes after Brahmā’s Rohiṇī. Searching (*mṛga*) for the head (*śīrṣa*), Rudra came to reside in the nakṣatra next to Mṛgaśīrṣā, Ārdṛā.

If we postulate that the “u” has simply been dropped from the modern spelling of Ārdṛā, the name of this star simply means *the place that attracted Rudra*. In fact it is not uncommon to see the name of this star spelled “Ārudṛā.”

Anger & Destruction

The birth of Rudra, god of Ārdrā, is described in many places with some variation.¹² Here is a compilation of the tale:

After Brahmā had created the major components of the universe, he needed to create living beings to populate it. First he generated four wonderful beings and said to them, “Populate the universe!”, but they refused. They were completely uninterested in working within the material world, because their ambitions were purely spiritual. Brahmā became extremely angry that his first children would disobey him. Yet he also knew that their reason for rejecting his wish was valid.

So he tried to control his anger, but it built up behind his eyebrows, which formed more and more drastically into a profound scowl. The power of his fury caused them to begin to glow. It became so intense that Brahmā could no longer hold it back. Instead of expressing it upon his saintly sons, he cast the anger out from his forehead and it became a dark purplish child who wailed and howled furiously.

“Who am I?” it demanded to know.

“You are Rudra (The Wailer, The Howler)!” declared Brahmā.

The child was half male and half female, so Brahmā said, “Be split!” Rudra and his wife Rudrānī then took separate forms.

“Again split!” declared Brahmā.

Then, Rudra and Rudrānī each split into eleven forms of themselves.

“Now, go to your rightful places and create offspring!” declared Brahmā.

So they did; Fierce, angry, howling creatures of fire, storm, and destruction they created by the thousands.

¹² **Bhāgavata Purāṇa** 3.12; **Viṣṇu Purāṇa** 1.7 & 8; **Devī Bhāgavat** 7; **Mahābhārata** Vana.12.

Seeing this Brahmā cried, “Dear children, please stop! Destruction must be balanced, measured and contained. It cannot proliferate without limit. Instead of creating more inauspicious beings, go now and meditate upon Godhead. This will calm you and make you auspicious.”

The eleven Rudra and Rudrāṅī consolidated themselves into a single male and female and followed Brahmā’s order. By so doing Rudra and Rudrāṅī became auspicious, and so received the names Śiva (“He Who is Auspicious”), and Pārvatī (“She Who has Risen Higher”).

Rudra was born when Brahmā’s creative ambitions were frustrated. Ārdrā is the frustration of creativity. It represents all the things we must overcome before we can create and attain our desired objectives.

Rudra brings destruction, which can easily become overwhelming, but which also serves a purpose. Ārdrā empowers humanity to destroy, forget, and let go of inauspicious things.

The Necessity of Destruction

Rudra’s role in the universe is Ārdrā’s role in our lives: destruction. We need destruction because without it there is no space for creation.

The creator, Brahmā, lives for trillions of years, and each of his “days” lasts for millions and millions of human years. The creator cannot rest while his creations are active. Rudra and his children have to begin dismantling the creation before brahma can rest. If Rudra did not perform his role of destruction, Brahmā could not rest and restore his creative energy.

Ārdrā allows us to rest. When things need to “rest in peace” they need Ārdrā.

Íśa Upanishad (11) tells us that this unlearning (destruction) is just as important as learning (creation).

Ārdrā allows us to unlearn, to destroy ignorance and forget what should be forgotten.

Protector of Divine Rasa

Residents of the holy city of Vṛṇḍāvana tell a sacred legend of Śiva as “Gopeśvara Mahādeva.” This tale beautifully illustrates how destruction of the unreal and utter forgetfulness and abandonment of one’s illusory ego is required before one can enter into the true beauty and pleasure of spiritual abundance. It reflects in the order of the stars. Rohiṇī is central, representing the blessed objective of beauty and fertility. It is nourished on both sides by the solar force of Agñī’s Kṛttikā and the lunar force of Soma’s Mṛgaśīrṣā. Then it is bracketed on both sides by the difficult walls of Yama’s Bharanī and Rudra’s Ārdrā. Here is a tale of how the god of Ārdrā holds the key to entrance past these walls and into the blessed realm.

In the middle of the full-moon-lit autumn night, Śrī Kṛṣṇa held the magnificent “dance of *rāsa*,” manifesting infinite romantic beauty. Śiva rushed to the spot to participate, but Vṛṇḍā, the goddess of Vṛṇḍāvana, stopped him in his tracks at the outskirts of the forest groves. “You are not permitted to enter!” She declared.

Śiva was crushed and dejected. “Why!?”

“No men enter here besides Kṛṣṇa,” Vṛṇḍā explained. “Because you hold on to the false-identity of being a male, your presence cannot be tolerated!”

From a great distance, Śiva could hear and see and smell and feel the excitement of the *rāsa*-dance. This drove him mad with desire.

“I am Rudra!!!” He declared. “I can destroy everything!!! Therefore I will destroy my own male ego!” With this ferociously powerful determination he entered meditation upon the supreme female, Śrī Rādhā, the central figure of the *rāsa*-dance, seeking her blessing.

Hearing his prayers, Śrī Rādhā sent her closest confidant, Lalitā, to Śiva, who sat in fiery, passionate meditation at the edge of the forest. Lalitā imparted to Śiva all the profound conceptions required to develop the inner ego of a purely feminine goddess fit to partake in Śrī Kṛṣṇa's paramount revelry of *rāsa*. Yet Śiva's male body remained.

Lalitā escorted him to the Yamunā. By her blessing, when Śiva again emerged from the water he possessed a new physical self to match his new internal self: he had the form of a divine goddess of *rāsa*, a Gopī.

When Śrī Kṛṣṇa saw this new gopī entering the *rāsa*-dance hand in hand with Lalitā a surge of happiness and mischief erupted from his transcendental being. Because this gopī was none other than Śiva (who is called Maheśvara, the great controller) Kṛṣṇa playfully nicknamed her Gopeśvara.

Today, pilgrims to Vṛṇḍāvana seeking to eventually participate in Śrī Kṛṣṇa's divine *Rāsa* dance always pray to Śiva as Gopeśvara. Their prayer is that Rudra will destroy the ego that makes them unqualified to participate in such divine bliss.

When the destructive force of Ārdrā is given spiritual direction, it dismantles the false ego and allows one entry into blessed realms of being.

Repeating Patterns ~ *Punarvasu*



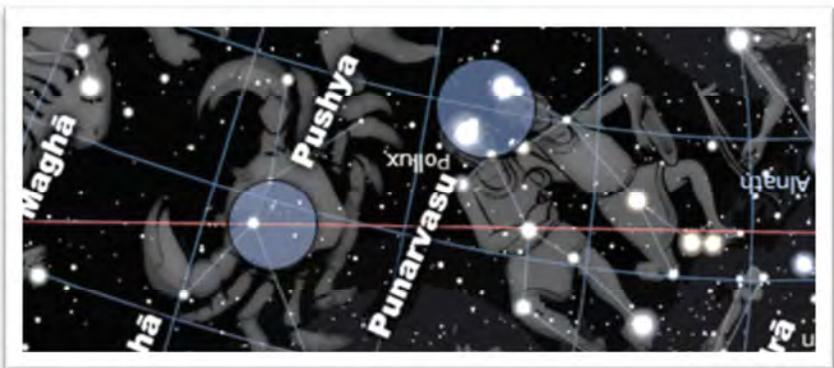
Name Punarvasu

Meaning Reignition

Symbol An arrow returned to the quiver

Deity Aditi – the universal mother

Main Stars Heads of the twins: Castor and Pollux



Punar means *again*. *Vasu* means *bright*. So the word *Punarvasu* can mean, “Becoming bright again” (Reignition). *Punarvasu* is about things happening *again*; Things happening within other things, within themselves; in cycles; in repetition.

A fractal – an image formed by a pattern repeating itself within itself – is an excellent symbol for *Punarvasu*. The classical symbol is an arrow put back into a quiver after it has been shot.

Mother of her own Father

Here is an example of fractal patterns within patterns: The goddess of *Punarvasu* is *Aditi* – who is the mother of her own father. *Aditi* is the fabric of space itself, so she is the raw material *Brahmā* draws upon for creation. Thus, she is the real “mother” of *Brahmā*’s children, including her own father *Dakṣa*. She helped create *Dakṣa*, and later she took shape in the world by being born as his daughter. The son comes from the mother, and then the mother comes from the son.

Thus *Rg Veda* (10.72.4) says: “*Aditi* comes from *Dakṣa*, but *Dakṣa* comes from *Aditi*.”

Boundless Unity

The name *Aditi* literally means *boundless*. She is the fabric of space itself, the boundless matrix within which everything else exists. Because space is the womb within which all live develops, she is the “universal mother.” Especially the “*vasu*” – the luminous gods – are all her children.

To be boundless means to have no boundaries, to be whole, unbroken and undivided. The goddess of non-division is the mother of the gods. Her sister’s name is *Diti*, which means *divided*. This goddess of division is the mother of the anti-gods. The idea emerges that unity is a godly principle, while division is ungodly. Things that unite have godly effects, while things that divide have ungodly effects.

Aditi's Punarvasu empowers humanity to work cooperatively, become unified; to come together and form a larger pattern within larger patterns.

Aditi is not only the mother of the gods, but she is also the mother of the original Godhead when He appears tangibly within this universe as an *avatār* (“incarnation”). This is another example of fractal patterns, Aditi comes from Godhead, but Godhead comes from Aditi.

Mother of God

The concept of being the Mother of a being that has no origin and is the origin of everything is another perfect example of the fractal patterns-within-patterns that symbolizes Punarvasu.

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (8.16-18) describes how Aditi became the mother of existence itself, Viṣṇu:

A powerful demon named Bali conquered all the worlds and the gods lost all power. Aditi requested her husband Kaśyapa to give her a son who could save them. Kaśyapa told her how to perform a ritual for this purpose. But since Aditi knew that only Godhead could save the gods from this situation, her performance of this ritual attracted God to become her child.

When the ritual was complete, Godhead appeared and assured her, “I will become your son, but this situation cannot be remedied by force. I will come up with a different strategy.”

Aditi then conceived a child with Kaśyapa, who was born mysteriously as the Godhead Viṣṇu – blackish with glittering yellow clothes, four armed and gloriously beautiful. Before their very eyes, He transformed into a very small boy; a student-mendicant, named Vāmana.

Viṣṇu thus became the younger brother of Aditi’s first child, Indra. The young boy soon set off to where Bali was performing an elaborate ritual to celebrate his victory over the gods. When he entered the arena, everyone was struck with his beauty and effulgence and greeted him

with warm respects. Bali, especially, was charmed by the endearing beauty of Vāmana.

“It is my great fortune that such a wondrous spiritualist has come to my palace! The opportunity to serve you will free me from all the sins of my selfish life. You must have come here to ask something from me, please ask it! I will happily give you any wealth or pleasure you desire!”

Vāmana was very pleased with Bali’s humble and spiritually informed attitude. He said to Bali, “You are wonderful because you have good teachers and because your grandfather is the great Prahlād. You are as great and dear to me as your grandfather! But I do not need any wealth or pleasures. It is not good for a spiritualist to accept such things. I just want whatever land I can claim for myself in three paces.”

Bali replied, “You are wise beyond your years, but still inexperienced. You should take what you can get when it is offered! I own even the heavens. I can give you anything. Someone who asks a favor from me should never have to ask another person for a favor again! So why should you only take three paces of land? It would defame me to give such a petty gift!”

Vāmana replied, “If a person can’t be satisfied with three steps of land, he won’t be satisfied with the three worlds. Self-control makes one happy. Feeding uncontrolled desire causes misery.”

Smiling, Bali said, “Alright, then. You are very wise. I shall happily give you what you request.” With that he took up his waterpot to wash his palm in a gesture of solemn promise, but no water would flow from it. When Bali used a straw to unblock the nozzle, Śukra (the deity of Venus and Bali’s guru) suddenly appeared, holding his eye in pain. He had taken a tiny form and purposely clogged the pot, and the straw had poked out his eye.

Śukra said, “This little boy is Viṣṇu! He has been born to Aditi to protect her children, the gods. You’ve gone and promised to give him land!? He will take *everything* from you and give it to your enemy, Indra! You fool!”

You will be homeless!!! He will take the entire universe in just two steps and make you unable to fulfill your promise, and thus send you to hell! Charity is good, *up to a point!* Besides, you did not say “Om” when making this promise to give him land, so it is not binding!”

Bali thought about this deeply for a few moments. Then he said, “Mother Earth said, ‘I can bear any burden, but I cannot bear a liar.’ Truthfulness is the soul of morality, without which there can be no good fortune. I don’t mind losing my riches, so long as I do not lose my morality.”

Śukra was *infuriated*. “You think you know morality better than I do!? So be it, then! Become penniless!!!” Śukra then disappeared.

Bali did not mind this in the least. He very happily worshipped the young spiritualist with all respect and offered him to take the land he desired.

Vāmana then began to grow to *huge* proportions, revealing that he was all-pervading Viṣṇu. Bali could see the entire universe within his “body.” Here is another instance of fractal patterns-within-patterns: Vāmana was standing within the universe, yet the entire universe existed within Vāmana.

With one step the huge Viṣṇu covered all of normal earthly space. With the second he reached the highest extent of the heavens.

The anti-gods rushed forward to kill Viṣṇu, but Viṣṇu’s associates appeared and drove them back effortlessly into subterranean regions. Viṣṇu’s eagle, Garuda, then arrested Bali and tied him in ropes. Vāmana said to Bali, “You promised me three steps of land, but I have taken everything you possess and more, in just two steps. Since you cannot fulfill your boastful promise, you must enter the hells.”

Bali replied, “That is no problem. Your punishment is always just. We anti-gods always want power and prestige. When you punish us it is kind because it opens our eyes to a more blissful reality that we are not all-powerful, we are but fragments of your energy and should endeavor

only to serve your desires! Everything you have taken from me is a blessing. What is the use of material prosperity? It only puts one into deeper spiritual ignorance! But I do not wish to be untruthful. I have offered you three steps of property. I owned the three worlds, which you took in just two steps. Surely the owner of land is even more valuable than the land itself, so I must be worth at least two steps. Please place your third step on my head and claim me as your servant. This will fulfill my promise.”

Thrilled by the unwavering devotion of this great soul amidst demons, Viṣṇu declared, “Because your devotion for me is so pure that you were willing to happily surrender everything, I will give you something greater than even the gods possess! In the future you will become the king of the Gods. Until then you can live on a special planet called Sutala, free from the influence of time and decay. No one will be able to conquer you. I will protect you always and will personally stay there with you as your gatekeeper.”

Budha Curses Aditi

Mahābhārata (Śānti.34.96-98):

Budha (the god of Mercury) came to Aditi’s home hungry. She was at the end of feeding her children, so she asked him to wait a moment. Budha became upset over this transgression of etiquette and cursed her, “You so love your children!? Then become Vivasvān’s mother a second time!” Vivasvān was reborn to Aditi as Aṅḍa and his fiery heat caused her great pain during pregnancy.

This serves as another illustration of repetition, the main theme of Punarvasu.

Rebirths of Aditi

Aditi herself has many rebirths, just as a fractal appears many times within itself. All of them center on being the mother facilitating the birth of Godhead. Mahābhārata (Śānti.43.6) says that Viṣṇu is born *seven times* to Aditi. This repetition is interesting to the study of Punarvasu.

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (10.3) says that Aditi was once Pṛśṇi, the wife of a different son of Brahmā, named Sutapas. She performed great austerities in devotion to Viṣṇu for 12,000 years. When Viṣṇu appeared to grant her wishes, she wished that he would become her son, which he did.

Kṛṣṇa told this story to his mother, to let her know that she and he are always mother and son, repeatedly. Thus Kṛṣṇa's mother, Devakī is yet another incarnation of Aditi.

The story behind Aditi becoming Devakī is also fascinating. It is told in Devī Bhāgavata (4): Aditi was the first wife of Kaśyapa, and she gave birth to the gods, headed by Indra. Her sister, Diti, the second wife, was jealous and asked Kaśyapa for children who would be equals to the gods. Thus eventually she gave birth to the anti-gods ("demons"). But Aditi became fearful and sent her child to destroy the first child in her sister's womb. Diti then cursed Aditi: "Your child will repeatedly lose his kingdom to my children! And you will lose your children!"

The first part of the curse is constantly being fulfilled as Diti's children, the anti-gods, attempt to conquer the gods, and often succeed. The second part of the curse was fulfilled when Aditi became Devakī, who had to suffer the loss of many children at the hands of her atrocious brother Kāṁsa.

The Highest Blossom ~ *Puṣya*



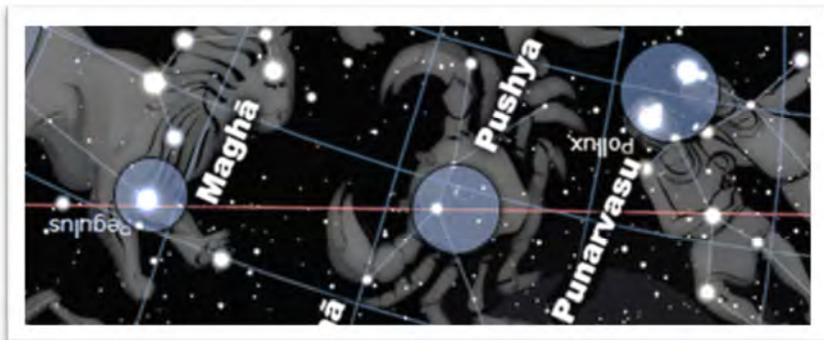
Name Puṣya

Meaning Flowering

Symbol Lotus

Deity Bṛhaspati - god of prayer

Main Stars γ , δ (Asellus Australis) and θ Cancri.



The word *puṣya* has two primary meanings:

1. The top/best part of a thing; usually referring to a flower, the top and best part of a plant.
2. *Nourishment*; which allows us to blossom and grow.

There is a motherly, loving and devotional overtone to the word *puṣya*. Love, after all, is the topmost blossom on the flower of life.

Puṣya's primary symbol is a lotus, the most beautiful and wholesome flower. The udders of a cow are sometimes used to symbolize Puṣya; conveying the theme of nourishment.

Bṛhaspati, the god of prayer and devotions, is the deity of Puṣya. In Bhagavad Gītā (10.24), Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:

purodhasām ca mukhyaṁ mām viddhi pārtha bṛhaspatim

“Among the best priests, know me to be Bṛhaspati.”

Among all priests, Bṛhaspati is the best. A priest is a person who facilitates our connection to the divine. Prayer is an interactive union with the divine. Bṛhaspati is the god who masterfully conducts religious rituals and prayers – the technologies of divine communion.

Puṣya is always thought of as being among the most fortunate and prosperous of Vedic stars. Other names for Puṣya are Sidhya (“*perfect*”) and Tiṣya (“*auspicious*”). Why? What is the connection between devotional prayer and prosperity?

In Gītā (10.38) Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:

nītir asmi jigīṣatām

“For those whose desire victory, I am morality.”

Puṣya is a successful and prosperous star because it facilitated communion with the divine, which engenders morality, which leads to true victory and prosperity.

What *is* morality? It is what distinguishes “right” from “wrong.” Right and wrong, though, are *not* absolute. What is right in one circumstance is wrong in another. It might be wrong to use a knife to kill someone, yet right to use the same knife for slicing bread. It might be wrong to kill someone, but right to kill someone who is on the brink of killing many other people. Morality is *relative*. And that’s why it’s complicated.

We can’t *really* be morally strong without understanding moral relativity: knowing how to apply a moral principle in many different circumstances. This requires serious contemplation, reflection, and *depth*. Bṛhaspati facilitates all these things: contemplation, meditation, prayer; and by doing so he strengthens *real* morality, and thus causes us to be more victorious and prosperous.

Through Puṣya, Bṛhaspati empowers human beings to commune with deeper principles. This strengthens morality and causes prosperity and victory. It eventually leads to selfless devotional intimacy with the divine.

The Son of the Sage of Fire

Rg Veda (4.40.1) and Mahābhārata (Adi.66) clearly state that Bṛhaspati is the son of Angiras. Angiras is Brahmā’s son, was born from the coals of a fire. He is therefore a fire-sage. His son, Bṛhaspati is sometimes called “the son of fire,” but this doesn’t mean Bṛhaspati is the son of Agñi, the fire god.

From his father Bṛhaspati inherits affinity and skill with fire. Fire is symbolic of religion and morality because the light of fire shows us the correct path, and the warmth of fire nourishes us. Fire is the focal point of most religious rituals, especially Vedic, because it *transforms* things. It transforms matter to energy, thus allowing sacrifices to be delivered to the gods.

Bṛhaspati's mother is named Śraddhā, which means *trust, faith, and confidence*. The god of communion with the divine is born from trust, faith, and confidence.

Puṣya encourages faith and devotion.

Priest and Guru of the Gods

Bṛhaspati was very religiously inclined from birth and therefore went to a sacred place to commune with the divine. Śiva was very impressed with the boy and granted him the position of the priest and guru of all the gods, and gave him custodianship of the astrological planet Jupiter.

Much of what an astrologer knows as the traits of Jupiter can therefore be transposed into Puṣya. You can think of Puṣya as if it was Jupiter as a star: It is very positive, helpful, nurturing, and allows things to grow, develop, prosper and blossom in a moral and wholesome manner.

Milking the Earth

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (4.17-18) tells a story which ties into using the udders of a cow as Puṣya's symbol:

Once upon a time, the Earth became very weak and there was extreme famine. Godhead empowered a king named Pṛthu to remedy the situation. The king took up a bow and threatened the Earth, "you must produce!"

The Earth-goddess in her form as a cow fled as fast as she could, but she could not escape the king. Submitting to him, she explained why she had been causing famine, "No one takes care of me anymore. They just take as much as they can from me, and do not even use my bounty to worship Godhead! Therefore I have made my surface rocky and hilly, so that the water cannot enrich the soil and nothing will grow. But I submit to you now to change this situation! Bring me a calf. The milk I then give will restore everything I have withheld."

First the king made the chief of humanity (Svāyambhuva Manu) into a “calf” and obtained as “milk” all the grains and vegetables needed to feed the citizens. Then various groups used various people as “calves,” and through those calves they got all they desired from the Earth. The first group to do so was the sages. They selected Bṛhaspati to become the calf, and through him obtained “milk” from the Earth in the form of mantras and hymns that would make the mind clean and pure.

Punishing the King of the Gods

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (6.7) tells how Bṛhaspati punished Indra, the king of the gods:

Once, Indra was enjoying very opulently and luxuriantly in his regal assembly hall, surrounded by beautiful and influential admirers and his extremely beautiful queen. Bṛhaspati entered and Indra neglected to stop his revelry to welcome his priest and guru.

Seeing Indra reeking of the typical egoistic pollution that accompanies material enjoyment, Bṛhaspati simply turned around and left.

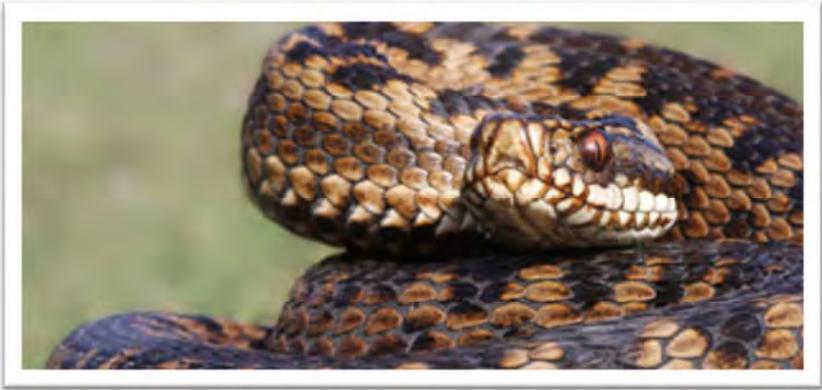
When the doors closed behind his departing guru, Indra suddenly realized his error and went in search of him to apologize. But Bṛhaspati wanted to teach Indra an important lesson, so he became invisible.

The anti-gods heard news that the gods were without their guide and priest, and so they attacked the heavens. They severely wounded the gods and brought them to the brink of total defeat.

This illustrates that without Puṣya we cannot be successful. Being “without Puṣya” means losing our unity with the divine. Ego destroys this union. Thus, when fouled by the ego of power and luxury we, like Indra, lose access to divine communion, and all the blossoms of our prosperity wither.

This story of Indra and Bṛhaspati will continue through many of the rest of the stars.

Serpentine Embrace ~ *Āśleṣā*



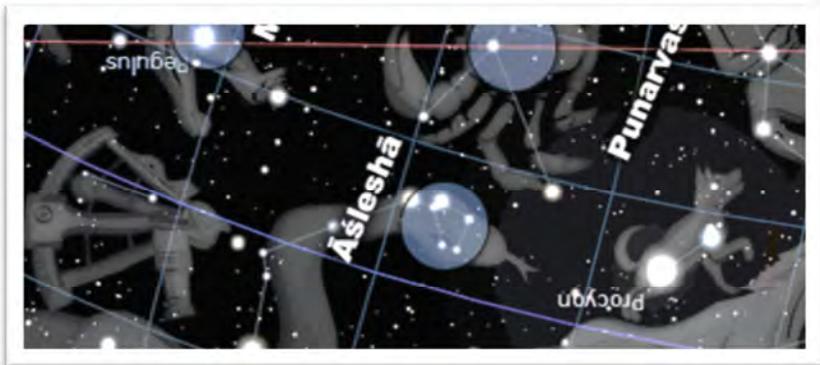
Name Āśleṣā

Meaning Embrace

Symbol Coiled serpent

Deity Nāga – the dragons

Main Stars The head of the hydra: δ , ϵ , η , ρ , σ Hydrae



The word *āśleṣā* means, “intimate connection, intimate contact, embracing, entwining, adhering, and clinging.” A coiled serpent is a fitting symbol for *Āśleṣā*, because serpents coil around things: embracing and entwining with them.

Āśleṣā’s deity is the “*Nāga*” – supernatural serpents, a.k.a. “dragons.” Like all serpents they have scales, forked tongues and powerful poisons. Unlike most serpents *Nāga* can combust their spit poisons, usually have many heads, have super-human intellect and talent, and can shape-shift in and out of humanoid and intermediate forms. They are protectors of vast treasures.

Sometimes, ordinary snakes (particularly the King Cobra) can be called “*nāga*” as an honorific. All snakes are connected to *Āśleṣā*, but the deities of *Āśleṣā* are the supernatural dragons, not ordinary serpents.

Rivalry and Jealousy

I’ll tell you a story about the origin of the *Nāga*.

One of the sons of *Brahmā* is *Marīci*. His son is *Kaśyapa*, the “genetic engineer of the universe.” *Kaśyapa* married 13 sisters. With each wife he produced different species of offspring, from gods to insects.

According to *Mahābhārata* (Adi.16), one wife, *Kadru*, wanted to have many, many children; while another wife, *Vinata*, desired only two very powerful children. *Kadru* laid 1000 eggs which quickly hatched into so many different varieties of serpents, the foremost of whom were the *Nāga*. *Vinata* laid two eggs which took a very long time to hatch. One of the children became *Aruṇa*, who drives the chariot of the Sun and shields the world from the fury of his heat. The other was the gigantic King of Eagles, *Garuḍa*, who became the associate and carrier of *Viṣṇu*.

Kadru was jealous of the power her husband allotted to her sister’s two children, and devised a plan to ruin her. She made a bet: “I bet you that the color of the tail of the divine horse that emerged from the ocean of milk is not white! If I am right, you and your children are my slaves. If

you are right, my children and I are your slaves.” Kadru, however, rigged the bet, by asking her black serpent children to mix into the hair of the horse’s tail. The serpents who refused their mother’s request on moral grounds became a separate, special branch of the Nāga race. The rest of the serpents mixed into the hair, making it appear black. Vinata thus lost the bet and became a servant of Kadru.

It was then that Garuḍa hatched from his egg, born into slavery. He submitted but developed hatred of the serpents as a result. Eventually, he asked the Nāga, “How can I be released of this debt to you?”

“Bring us *soma*, the nectar of immortality!” They replied.

Garuḍa “stole” *soma* from the Gods, but conspired with their king, Indra, so that Indra reclaimed the *soma* before the serpents had a chance to drink it. Garuḍa was freed from servitude the moment he placed the nectar before the Nāga. As Indra appeared from out of nowhere to snatch back the elixir, drops of it splashed onto the kuśa grass, which is sharp like a razor blade. The Nāga became very powerful by licking up these drops, but also split their tongues on the sharp grass in the process.

Āśleṣā has an inherent weakness towards deception and jealousy, owing to the fact that its deity was born into such an environment.

Pleasures beyond Paradise

The Nāga inhabit and control a unique realm of the universe: “Nāga-Realm,” the deepest of the seven netherworlds. Because they dwell at the very bottom of the physical dimensions, we hear in Mahābhārata (Adi.36) that they, “hold the earthly realm aloft upon their hoods.” Thus the Nāga are very strong and can *hold* things better than any other creatures. The very word *āśleṣā* implies this! One can think of the boa constrictor or python as a concrete example of a serpent’s power to embrace and hold.

Āśleṣā empowers humanity to embrace strong attachments and affections with enduring emotion and desire. Thus Āśleṣā also promotes the ability to bear great weights and responsibilities towards those we love.

The Nāga’s netherworld is *not* similar to Judeo-Christian hell. It is a place of grandeur and pleasure, not a place of punishment. Chapter 5 of Viṣṇu Purāṇa describes it: It is more beautiful than heaven, full of radiant jewels, exotic groves and lakes, and breathtaking serpentine maidens eager to enjoy! The air carries sweet scents and music. The ground is multicolored, soft and mixed with jewels and gold.

The 24th Chapter of the 5th section of Bhāgavata Purāṇa concurs, adding that this world is like a luxurious resort, free from infections, fatigue, and aging. The Sun and other luminaries cannot shine into these nether regions. The entire world is lit instead by the brilliance held within fantastic gems that the residents wear, often as crown-jewels on their serpentine hoods.

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa states that the Nāga are extremely influential throughout all seven of the nether realms. Vāyu Purāṇa lists the specific Nāga who predominate each nether realm: Kāliya, Takṣaka, Hemaka, Vainateya, Kirmira, and Vāsuki. The Bhāgavatam clarifies that the fifth and seventh nether-realms particularly belong to the Nāga. The seventh realm is the home to the most powerful and impressive of the Nāga, headed by their king, Vāsuki.

Through Āśleṣā, the Nāga empower human beings to obtain luxury, and embrace sensual pleasure and enjoyment via charisma, charm, mystique, and cunning.

Vāsuki – King of Dragons

In Bhagavad-Gita (10.28), Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:

sarpāṇām asmi vāsukiḥ

“Among serpents I am Vāsuki.”

The most celebrated tale involving Vāsuki involves how the gods and anti-gods produced the original nectar of immortality by churning the cosmic ocean of milk.

Churning a bucket of milk will make a person tired, and churning an entire ocean was a feat even for the gods to accomplish. They needed enormous apparatus like continents to stand on and mountains to churn with. The rope to turn this mountainous churning rod would have to be fantastically strong and long. Everyone agreed that the king of serpents, Vāsuki would be the only being that could act as the rope.

Vāsuki, however, was far off in the deepest netherworld. Garuḍa, proud of his ability to carry away snakes in his beak, stepped forward and announced that he would bring Vāsuki. When he arrived and explained the situation, Vāsuki replied, “If it’s so urgent, carry me to the spot at once.”

Garuḍa, however, could not lift Vāsuki off the ground. Thus he returned to the gods empty handed. Śiva then extended his hand to the netherworld and Vāsuki wrapped himself around Śiva’s wrist like a bracelet.

Thereafter, Vāsuki firmly *embraced* the mountain in the middle of the ocean and the gods and anti-gods could successfully churn the cosmic milk.

Vāsuki cooperated happily with Śiva but embarrassed haughty Garuḍa. It is said that snakes are enemies of common people, but they never harm a saint¹³. Similarly Āśleṣā interests us in using our charms and charismas to enjoy life, but it also makes us favorable to the truly godly.

¹³ For example: Buddha is often depicted with an umbrella of hooded snakes protecting him. Viṣṇu is almost always depicted in this way. Śiva is always adorned with serpents.

Śeṣa – The Spiritual Serpent

In Bhagavad Gita (10.29) Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:

anantaś cāsmi nāgānām

“Among the Nāga I am Ananta.”

In the previous verse of Gita, Kṛṣṇa said that among *serpents* he is Vāsuki, now he says that among *Nāga* he is Śeṣa. This indicates that Śeṣa is the truest Nāga, distinguished most fully from his serpentine kin. In comparison to Śeṣa even the great dragon Vāsuki seems like a snake.

Still, Vāsuki became the king of the Nāga because Śeṣa had no interest in taking the position. Displeased by the sensual orientation of his kin, Śeṣa prefers to be solitary and remain apart from them. Instead Śeṣa takes up an intimate relationship with Viṣṇu.

When Viṣṇu lies upon the cosmic ocean of causality, Śeṣa appears and folds his coils into a soft bed for Viṣṇu, while spreading his thousands of hoods above him like an umbrella.

Viṣṇu has Garuḍa the eagle as his carrier, and Śeṣa the serpent as his bed. The two, eagles and serpents, should be sworn enemies. But the influence of Viṣṇu is so pacifying and pleasant that even deadly enemies give up their mutual hatred and cooperate happily to serve him.

Śeṣa has so many heads they are essentially infinite. This is one reason why he also bears the name Ananta, which means *endless*.

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (10.1.14) explains that Śeṣa is an incarnation of Viṣṇu, who returns to his original form as Kṛṣṇa’s elder brother, Balarāma. Śeṣa’s role is always to support and guard Viṣṇu. When Viṣṇu appears as Kṛṣṇa, Śeṣa supports and protects him by becoming his older brother. Since Śeṣa is the foremost Nāga, Āśleṣā attains its favorability towards the spiritual, in spite of and augmented by its otherwise netherworldly, pleasure loving nature.

The divine qualities of Śeṣa are more fully and purely realized in Śeṣa's own star: Uttara Bhādrapadā. But still, it is not difficult to see the intimate connection between Śeṣa and Āśleṣā. If we merely drop the “l” as an irregularity of pronunciation, the word Āśleṣā becomes *ā-śeṣa* - “the place of Śeṣa.”

Āśleṣā interests humanity in mystical spirituality.

Kāliya's Battle with Kṛṣṇa

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (10.16) tells the story of a powerful Nāga named Kāliya. Fearing Garuḍa, Kāliya made his home somewhere Garuḍa had been cursed to be unable to enter. That place happened to be in Kṛṣṇa's forest: Vṛṇḍāvana, within the depths of a pool formed by the river Yamunā.

Kāliya demonstrated the power of *holding* (“*āsleṣa*”) by causing the water to take solid shapes. He constructed a palace for himself *out of water*, in the water, and lived there with many beautiful Nāga maidens. However, his toxicity made the lake and surrounding area polluted. So Kṛṣṇa jumped into the water one day to challenge Kāliya and evict him.

Kāliya *held* Kṛṣṇa in an unbreakably strong *embrace* within his *coils* for a terribly long time. But Kṛṣṇa broke free and began to dance upon Kāliya's hundreds of hoods, each attempting to bite and spit fiery poison upon him. With each artful step of the dance Kṛṣṇa kicked upon each hood – his feet illuminated by the jewels there like an artist illuminated on stage by footlights. One by one the heads of Kāliya were broken and defeated by Kṛṣṇa. However, the Nāga maidens beseeched Kṛṣṇa sweetly, and he spared Kāliya and allowed him to return to Nāgaloka with a promise that he need no longer fear Kṛṣṇa's servant, Garuḍa.

By Kṛṣṇa's compassion, Kāliya became an enlightened serpent similar to Śeṣa. Here are excerpts of his statements to Kṛṣṇa after becoming enlightened (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 10.16.56-59):

“I am sorry for fighting with you, but I am a serpent, so it is my nature to become aggressive when challenged. It is so difficult for a person not to be a creature of habit. Please forgive me.

“You create the forces that create our habitual nature; that is why no one can overcome habit by their willpower alone. You are the wise being who frees everyone from bondage to their habitual conditioning. So, whether you punish me or show me mercy – either is for my benefit.”

Inherited Power ~ *Maghā*



Name	Maghā
Meaning	Power
Symbol	Throne
Deity	Pitṛ - ancestral spirits
Main Star	Regulus



The word *magha* means “power” and also means “gift.” The symbol of Maghā, a throne, is an image of inherited power. Indra, the king of the gods, seated on the throne of paradise is known as Maghavan. But it is the Pitṛ (ancestral spirits) who are the deities of Maghā – signifying that we inherit power from our ancestors.

Maghā bestows gifts “from our ancestors.” This literally indicates inheritance of power, career, fortune, and qualities (“DNA”). Such inheritance really comes as a result of efforts made in our previous births, so Maghā also indicates powers, qualities and abilities carried over from past lives.

Divine “Ancestors”

The Manu-Smṛti’s third chapter tells us that Pitṛ are divine beings who are the “forefathers” of us all. It says that some of Brahmā’s initial mental offspring created the Pitṛ, who in turn created powerful beings, who in turn produced the original members of the various species in the universe.

So the Pitṛ are an intermediary being between the original mental offspring of Brahmā and the subsequent physical offspring that created the gods, humans, animals, etc.

The Purāṇas, especially Vāyu and Brahmāṇḍa, describe many types of Pitṛ:

- 1) Original Pitṛ – divine ancestors;
 - a) Forefathers of non-humans
 - i) ...of the divine race called Sādhyā
 - ii) ...of the gods
 - iii) ...of the anti-gods and similar supernatural beings
 - b) Forefathers of humans
 - i) ...of intellectuals
 - ii) ...of rulers

- iii) ...of producers
- iv) ...of workers¹⁴

2) Souls of deceased human ancestors who *become* Pitṛ.

The main concern of the Pitṛ, regardless of their type, is to bring peace and prosperity to the souls of their descendants when we die and have to transition between one lifetime and the next. They perform sacrifices, prayers and meditations to pacify the chaos and confusion which tends to befall newly deceased souls.

The foremost of all the Pitṛ is Aryamā. In Bhagavad Gītā (10.29) Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:

pitṛñām ariyamā cāsmi

“Among the Pitṛ, I am Aryamā.”

We will discuss Aryamā in more detail, because he has his own star very close by, Uttara Phālgunī.

The Afterlife

Garuḍa Purāna’s 14th chapter relates:

The god of death, Yama is the master of the Pitṛ’s world, *pitṛ-loka* – the afterlife realm, which is “below” the earthly realm but “above” the nether-paradise of the Nāga.

The Pitṛ guide the soul through the afterlife, which contains experiences akin to our modern western concepts of heaven and hell. The Pitṛ help deceased souls face Yama, the god of death, who judges their deeds and rewards and punishes them accordingly.

¹⁴ The four types of Pitṛ who are forefathers of humans were created by Brahmā’s sons, Bhṛgu, Angiras, Pulastya, and Vasiṣṭha, respectively. The three types of Pitṛ who are forefathers of non-humans were created by Viṣṇu, Brahmā, and Atri, respectively.

To help correct specific wrongs, Yama sends the soul into any of the 28 “hells” of *pitṛloka*. To encourage and reward good deeds, Yama sends the soul into the “heaven” of *pitṛloka* where they enjoy heavenly delights with bodies similar to the gods.

When the due rewards and punishments are exhausted, Yama usually sends a soul to its next earthly birth. Occasionally, Yama will keep a soul for an extended period, promoting it into the ranks of the Pitṛ, or another type of divinity in some other realm.

Ancestor Worship

In ancient India, the Pitṛ were worshipped with approximately equal importance as the gods, but the rituals were different. Rituals for worshipping the Pitṛ are called *śrāddha* and always involve grains.¹⁵ Indeed the word *magha* can even connote “grain.”

The *śrāddha* ritual highlights the mutual indebtedness between ancestor and offspring. In Vedic culture, it is the duty of every child to have at least one child of his own. This is how we repay our debt to the ancestors who paved the way for our birth, and it helps insure success of the Pitṛ’s original duty: to populate the universe.

The divine “ancestors” help guide us through the afterlife when we die, and when our literal ancestors die it is our duty to make an effort to help them. Therefore a child performs *śrāddha* on behalf of his deceased parents. The ceremony worships not the deceased but the Pitṛ who will make the effort to ease the passing of the deceased.

¹⁵ The *śrāddha* ceremony is still very popular among Hindus, and is observed twice a year, during the waning moon of two months: *Aśvina* and *Caitra*. It also continues to have a strong influence in Buddhism, even as far as Japan.

Romantic Enjoyment ~ *Pūrva Phālgunī*



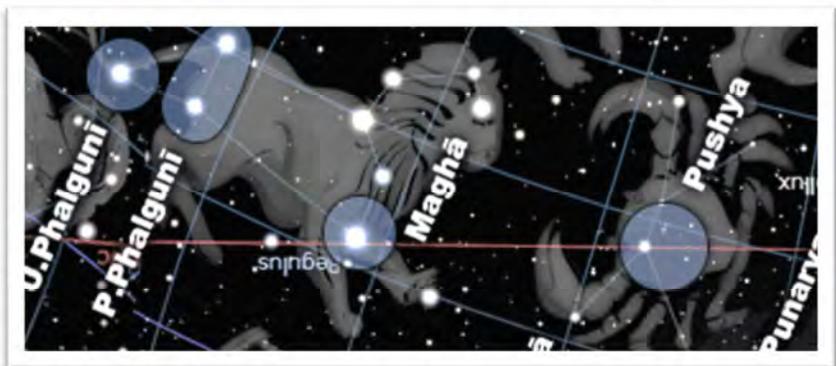
Name Pūrva Phālgunī

Meaning Reddish Lady (I)

Symbol Bed

Deity Bhaga - god of love and marriage

Main Stars δ and θ Leonis.



Pūrva Phālgunī is one of two consecutive nakṣatra named Phālgunī, and is thus our first encounter with a nakṣatra *pair*. As is usually the case with nakṣatra pairs, the first in the pair is prefixed as *Pūrva* Phālgunī (“the first Phālgunī”), and the second is *Uttara* Phālgunī (“the later/second Phālgunī”). Paired nakṣatra share similar meanings, with subtle differences.

The word *phālgunī* means “reddish lady,” which should remind us of the nakṣatra named Rohiṇī, since that word has the same meaning. As we noted while discussing Rohiṇī, the Vedic implication of “reddish lady” is a pubescent girl, fertile and eager to enjoy sexuality and procreation. It is therefore quite fitting that the symbol for both Phālgunī nakṣatras is a bed, and that their deities are gods of romance and marriage!

Pūrva Phālgunī is the domain of Bhaga - the god of love and marriage. The word *bhaga* means:

- A patron; a gracious, generous lord
- Good fortune, prosperity, happiness
- Beauty and loveliness
- Love, lust, Eros
- Vulva

Through Pūrva Phālgunī, Bhaga graciously dispenses happiness to humanity, via love and marriage. With its symbolic bed and its name depicting a fertile young lady, Pūrva Phālgunī is the star of happy lovers, romance, and marriage.

A Family of Expert Enjoyers

The names of Bhaga’s wife, sons and daughters reveal the ways Bhaga bestows romantic happiness to us.

Bhaga’s three sons are:

- Mahiman – greatness, majesty and hugeness
- Vibhu – solid, penetrating, and effective
- Prabhu - powerful, capable, and enduring

These names reveal the traits a male must possess to fully enjoy romantic happiness: Size (Mahiman) is literal in terms of stature and sexual organ but also indicates size of character: nobility and morality. Solidity (Vibhu) also has obvious physical and sexual meaning, as well as indicating ideal male character. Power (Prabhu) grants initiative and mastery which is important physically, sexually and socially.

Bhaga’s three daughters are:

- Suvratā – dedication, virtue and compliance
- Varāroha – beauty, mounting, and attractive hips
- Āśīs – desire and fulfillment

These names reveal the essential traits a female must bring to the romantic partnership. She must be dedicated (Suvratā), indicating virtue, patience and receptivity. She must be beautiful (Varāroha), indicating attractive hips and expertise in “mounting” and “riding”. Finally, she must be desirable (Āśīs), which indicates that she has an appetite for romance and that she is therefore capable of fulfilling romantic desires.

The name of Bhaga’s wife indicates what both genders must possess if they are to truly enjoy happiness together:

- Siddhi –perfection, unusual skill, and dexterity

This word, *siddhi*, has strong spiritual implications, indicating that romantic pleasure is not an end in and of itself, but a *part* of what we need in our greater journey towards a more significant and spiritual understanding of love and pleasure.

Pūrva Phālgunī allows one to develop dexterity and skill in these talents, arts, and character traits so as to enjoy a fulfilling and satisfying sensual and romantic life.

Negative Effects of Lust

The Mahābhārata (Sauptika Parva) tells the following story of Bhaga angering Rudra:

At the end of a divine age, the gods came together to divide up the surplus shares of sacrifices they had received. The eagerness to enjoy made them feel that they could leave Rudra out of the divvy.

When Rudra learned of this, he became furious and attacked. Those who were most lusty to enjoy the sacrificial portions were his main target. He cut off the hands of the god named Savitā, who was lusty to feel and grab all the resources for sense gratification. He took out the teeth of the god named Pūṣā, who was lusty to enjoy fine delicacies. He plucked out the eyes of Bhaga, who was lusty to look upon attractive forms.

The apologies of the gods finally placated Rudra and he was eventually pleased to return these to their owners.

The story illustrates that the desire to enjoy what Pūrva Phālgunī offers can easily bewilder us into greed and lust, the result of which is the opposite of happiness and bliss. Thus we must be on guard to maintain the primary male and female qualities of nobility (mahiman) and restraint (suvratā).

Divine Love and Romance

In modern times, with the rise of extremely dualistic concepts of religion, we tend to conceive of a huge gulf between matter and spirit, god and pleasure, etc. This divisive conception was not embraced by Vedic culture. Certainly dualism has some relevance, for not all things are identical. Selfishness and selflessness, for example, are polar opposites

– and thus so are lust and love. However, the Indian concept of divinity neutralizes, harmonizes, and integrates all opposites.

Bhaga is the god of “material” things such as romance, sex and marriage. Yet the word *bhaga* in the form “Bhagavān” is the most common classical Sanskrit term for a blessed being. The Purāṇas even define Bhagavān as a moniker of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Thus, in Sanskrit culture, the division between material and spiritual transforms.

Bhagavān means, “The possessor of Bhaga.” Sanskrit culture conceives of the Supreme Spirit as a being that has more Bhaga than anyone else: a blissful, attractive, talented and romantic entity.

Parāśara Muni defines the word Bhagavān in Viṣṇu Purāṇa (6.5.79): “To fully possess happiness (*bhaga*) one must have all majesty, power, fame, beauty, knowledge and detachment.”

Bhaga gives majesty – which means status, influence and wealth. He gives power – which means heroism, bravery and strength. Bhaga also gives fame – which means celebrity and good reputation. He also gives beauty – which attracts others to participate in ones pleasures.

Money, power, fame, beauty... these first four are obvious and well known ingredients of a person who can enjoy great pleasures. Knowledge is a lesser known requirement. We need expertise and skill to really enjoy the pleasures of life. Bhaga, the god of pleasures, also gives detachment – because attachment causes suffering. If we are only attached to enjoying pleasures, we will inevitably suffer. To be detached requires knowledge of what one really is – a spiritual being, not just a collection of senses to please. So in addition to giving money, power, fame, and beauty, Bhaga also gives knowledge and detachment. The complete package of six traits grants supreme pleasure.

The personality of Godhead, especially in the intimate form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is recognized by Parāśara and his son Vyāsa as the person most fit to be named Bhagavān.¹⁶

Pūrva Phālgunī has the special ability to grant pleasures and wealth in a manner that befits a spiritually progressive person. It also can incline one to more deeply appreciate the spiritual pleasures and opulence of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Bhaga and Bhakti

Again, to highlight how Indian theology does not stringently divide pleasure and happiness from spirituality: the Sanskrit word for romantic love and pleasure (*bhaga*) is made of the same root that makes the word for the yoga of divine love (*bhakti*).

Bhakti means loving the All-Attractive Divinity in very tangible, intimate manner which includes and really culminates its brilliance in romantic forms of love.

Pūrva Phālgunī thus has a special fertility for producing bhaktas. For example, Arjuna, the most famous dear friend of Kṛṣṇa, was born on a lunar day when the Moon spanned both phālgunī stars.¹⁷

The primary Indian calendar ties the lunar phases and the 27 stars to earthly days via the sunrise. The phase and star of the moon *at the time of sunrise* becomes the phase of that day, even if the actual phase itself changes before the next sunrise. Sometimes odd things happen: If the Sun rises when the moon is at the very end of Star A, the moon's normal motion can carry it through Star B and just into the very beginning of Star C by the time the next Sunrise happens. In this

¹⁶ Parāśara says so in **Viṣṇu-Purāṇa**. Vyāsa says so in **Śrīmad Bhāgavatam** 1.3.28

¹⁷ In **Mahābhārata** Virata Parva, Section 44 Arjuna says to his daughter in law: "I am known as Phalguna, my dear, because I was born in the snowy season on a day belonging to both Uttara- and Purva-Phalguni."

case Star B gets “skipped” that month. Or, if the Sun rises when the Moon is at the very beginning of Star A, it can still be just at the very end of Star A when the next sunrise occurs. In this case Star A gets “stretched” to cover two consecutive days in that month.

It is uncommon to be born on such days, but much more uncommon to be born when those days involve the few *paired* stars. Arjuna says he was born on a winter day when the Moon did exactly that; passed through *two* paired star-clusters – Pūrva and Uttara Phālgunī – in a single day. This earned him the name Phālguna.

The Phalgunis are stars of entertainment and friendship. Arjuna was a *dashing* hero, and a skilled dancer and musician. As for friendship, Arjuna is well known as a dear, dear friend of All-Attractive Śrī Krishna.

Vows of Friendship ~ *Uttara Phālgunī*



Name	Uttara Phālgunī
Meaning	Reddish Lady (II)
Symbol	Bed
Deity	Aryamā - god of vows and weddings
Main Star	Denebola



Uttara Phālgunī is the second in the Phālgunī pair of stars. Most of what we discussed about Pūrva Phālgunī applies to Uttara Phālgunī as well. The difference is that while the previous Phālgunī tends towards romance, Uttara Phālgunī towards friendship and marriage.

*Uttara Phālgunī is **the** star of marriage and commitments.*

The deity of Uttara Phālgunī is Aryamā, the brother of Pūrva Phālgunī's deity, Bhaga. As you may recall from the chapter on Maghā, In Bhagavad Gītā (10.29), Śrī Kṛṣṇa suggests that Aryamā is the foremost Pitṛ: *pitṛṇām aryamā cāsmi*, "Among the Pitṛs I am Aryamā."

This reveals that Aryamā dwells with and functions like the Pitṛ, well-wishing ancestors who protect us in difficult times. Aryamā is the foremost well-wisher and protector.

The word *aryamā* literally means *a dear friend*. The exact, most specific meaning is, *a friend who asks a girl to marry his friend*. If a boy has a crush on a girl, his close friend goes to the girl and tells her about the boy in such a way as to attract her attention and affections. That friend is "*aryamā*".

It is somewhat fitting that such a friend would never be mentioned in the Vedas as a solitary being, but is always addressed in relationship to his dear brothers: Bhaga, Mitra and Varuṇa.

Aryamā is the divine matchmaker. He pairs young men and women so that they can enjoy what Phālgunī has to offer: love, romance and marriage.

Uttara Phālgunī produces matchmakers and expert councilors in the arts of love and romance.

Wedding Vows

Rg Veda (2.27.5) says that Aryamā brings enjoyment even in the face of difficulties. This is very important for marriage, because the relationship between opposite principles, male and female, is rarely without

challenges. Aryamā is the love and affection which transforms such challenges into delightful romantic exchanges.

The next mantra says that the paths of Aryamā and Mitra are smooth.¹⁸ The next mantra says that Aryamā's path is *beautiful* and *loving, beyond hatred*. Then, the next confirms that Aryamā's path is particularly *beautiful*.

Uttara Phālgunī especially makes relationships beautiful, smooth and enjoyable; easing disagreements and promoting accord, harmony and felicity.

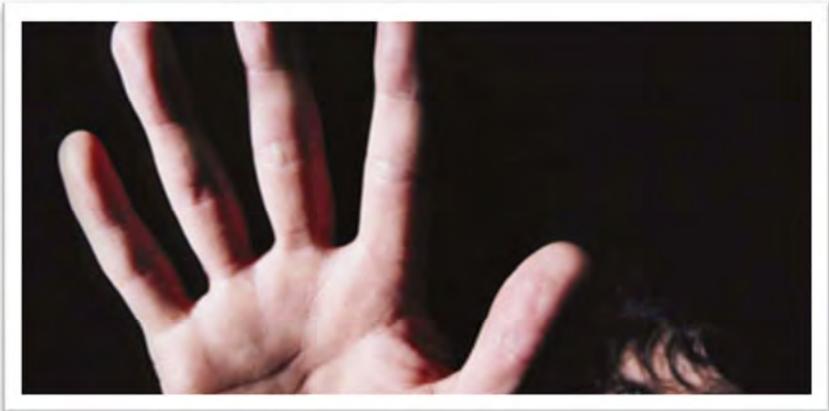
The traditional Vedic wedding begins with an invocation to Aryamā, and is followed by one to Aryamā and Bhaga together (gods of the two Phālgunī stars). The would-be groom sends two elders on his behalf to the father of the girl he wishes to marry, to ask for her hand in marriage. This is *exactly* the meaning of “*aryamā*”: a friend who asks for a girl to marry his friend. When asking his two elders to act in this role, the would-be groom recites two Vedic mantras invoking Aryamā and.

Ṛg (10.32.1): “Go straight to the target, bearing great and very satisfying gifts. Let these two reach their target happy and nourished!”

Ṛg (10.85.23): “Seek the bride and bring her to the groom. Travel smoothly to her with Aryamā and Bhaga.”

¹⁸ The **Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa** says that the Milky Way is this smooth path.

Dexterity ~ *Hasta*



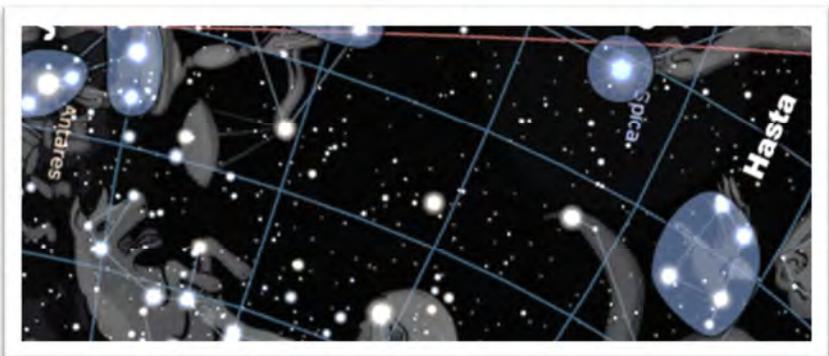
Name Hasta

Meaning Hand, grasp

Symbol Hand

Deity Savitā - god of sunrise

Main Stars The hand-like Corvus constellation



The word *hasta* refers to a hand, the part of the body that grasps, moves, manipulates, and utilizes things. So the symbol of Hasta, a hand, simply illustrates its direct meaning.

Hasta is the star of heightened awareness and dexterity.

Savitā is Hasta's deity. He is the god of sunrise, who wakes us up and inspires us to use our hands.

The word *savitā* means *the awakener*. It is made from the root *śu* which means "to inspire." Savitā inspires our awakening to awareness.

Savitā is connected with the Sunrise because when the Sun rises, we wake up. Light floods the world and we become aware of our surroundings. Rg Veda consistently treats Savitā – the agent bestowing cognition - as the Sun, particularly the *rising* Sun.

Eleven hymns in Rg Veda are entirely in honor of Savitā, and he is mentioned about 170 times throughout the book! Here are some that are relevant.

10.158.3: "Divine Savitā gives us sight as if from the mountaintop, and enables us to create."

Hasta creates "vision" (broad, far-reaching, and ambitious), and the dexterity to such visionary goals.

10.158.4: "[Savitā] puts vision in our eyes, into our bodies, into our world."

By spreading rays of light, the awakening sun (Savitā) enables our eyes to see the world. Similarly the soul spreads rays of sentience through our body and thus enables us to be conscious of our existence. Savitā is thus light *and* consciousness.

*Hasta grants heightened awareness. We become observant and difficult to deceive. We become more skilled, expert, and dexterous.*¹⁹

10.149 is an entire hymn describing Savitā as the creator of the earth and heavens. Modern thought also considers the Sun to be the force which enabled primordial elements to form into planets, including the earth.

10.139.1-2: **“Blonde Savitā rises in the east, spreading rays of eternal light by which we can nourish our desires like a cowherder. Shining upon the mortal world, the heavens, and the space between; he sets our sights upon the fertile pastures that spread from the east to the west, from within to without.”**

The Rg Veda here describes the rays of the Sun as *harikeśa*. This means that (a) the sunlight is like the golden-blond mane of the Sun, (b) Savitā is blonde haired, (c) the sun’s light originates from the brilliant rays of Hari, the Godhead.

Through Hasta, Savitā enables humanity to prosper by awakening to the new dawn, setting goals for the “day” and skillfully accomplishing them.

Brahmā Gayatrī

One part of Rg Vedic culture that has survived and thrived even up to today is a mantra from its third book which has become known as the *savitṛ* mantra, or the *brahma gayatrī* mantra. This mantra is ideal for communing with Savitā and unlocking the highest potentials of his star, Hasta.

Taittiriya Aranyaka (2.11.1-8) states that mantras recited spiritually must be *prefixed* with key words that unlock their spiritual significance.

¹⁹ Many attribute “magicians” to Hasta. Hasta indeed gives dexterity to utilize slight-of-hand, and the awareness to details that others miss amidst the smoke and mirrors.

“Om” is always to be the first syllable in the prefix. It identifies the spiritual fountainhead of all things, the Divine Being. Next, special syllables called *vyāhṛti* are to be affixed. These are the “utterances” which identify the “worlds” or levels of consciousness that set the context for the mantra to be chanted. The first three worlds are the most important, and so are called the *mahā-vyāhṛti* (“great utterance”). These are the words *bhūr bhuvah svaḥ* - identifying heaven, earth, and the space in between. Next comes the mantra itself, Rg Veda (3.62.10). The complete Brahmā Gayatrī thus assembled is:

*oṃ bhūr bhuvah svaḥ
tāt savitúr váreṇ(i)yaṃ
bhárgo devásya dhīmahi
dhíyo yó naḥ pracodáyāt*

Invoking Divinity

In the heavens, on earth and in the space between:

Upon that most excellent form of Savitā,
the effulgence of divinity, we meditate.

And by this meditation he becomes manifest to us.

What is “the most excellent form of Savitā (*savitur vareṇiyam*)?” As we know Savitā is the sun, which gives light and thus awareness. The *most* excellent form of awareness is to be conscious of divinity (*bhargo devasya*). The Sun lights the heavens, the earth and the space between. Similarly the most excellent form of consciousness shows us the divine everywhere, at all times. By meditating upon the most excellent form of consciousness, it becomes our own consciousness!

The highest potential for Hasta is to awaken a human being to grasp what this mantra describes: all-pervasive, all-encompassing consciousness of the divine.

Another relevant mantra for Hasta: Indian custom is, upon awakening in the morning, to rub ones hands together, look at them, and say:

*karāgre vasate lakṣmih
karamadhye sarasvati
karamūle tu govindaḥ
prabhāte karadarśanam*

“I look at my hands and realize that Lakṣmi (Goddess of Fortune) is at the top, Sarasvati (Goddess of Learning) is in the middle, but Govinda is at the root.”

This mantra reminds us that our hands produce money (Lakṣmi) as a result of our skill (Sarasvati), but we are powerless to do anything without the blessing of Viṣṇu (Govinda).

Multifaceted Brilliance ~ *Citrā*



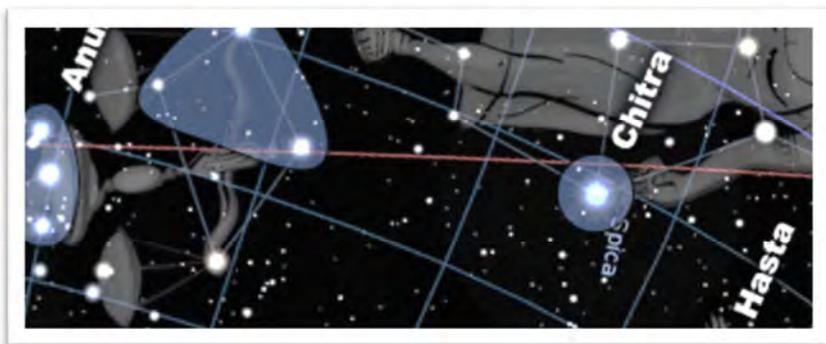
Name Citrā

Meaning Splendid

Symbol Multifaceted jewel

Deity Tvaṣṭā - god of design & creation

Main Star Spica



The word *citrā* means: excellent, brilliant, prismatic, multifarious, multifaceted, wondrous, and ingenious. Appropriately, the symbol of Citrā is an excellent gemstone, ingeniously cut into many facets to reveal its wondrous prismatic luster. The Deity of Citrā is Tvaṣṭā, the god of creations which resemble that expertly cut jewel.

Through Citrā, Tvaṣṭā empowers humanity to comprehend multi-faceted designs, and generate masterpieces and technological marvels.

The Creation of Creativity

Tvaṣṭā is one of several Vedic deities who exist in a primordial, abstract form and later take a specific shape at some early point in universal history. For example:

- Primordial Aditi, the goddess of Punarvasu, is the abstract principle of space itself, a domain in which things can exist. Later she takes a concrete form as a goddess born as a granddaughter of Brahmā.
- Primordial Savitā, the god of Hasta, is the abstract principle of conscious awareness. Later he takes a concrete form as a god born from Aditi.
- Tvaṣṭā, the deity of Citrā, is similar. In primordial form Tvaṣṭā is the abstract power to create. Later on he becomes the god of creative expertise, taking concrete form as a god born from Aditi.

The abstract, primordial forms of gods exist prior to tangible creation, and thus prior to Brahmā. Logically, the abstract power to create must exist before anything can be created. So the abstract form of Tvaṣṭā exists before Brahmā, and Brahmā must use Tvaṣṭā's energy to design and create the universe in which Tvaṣṭā soon takes birth as a tangible being. That is why the Vedas can call Tvaṣṭā "the Creator" without contradicting the idea that Brahmā is the creator.

This symbiotic relationship between Brahmā and Tvaṣṭā causes their stars, Rohiṇī and Citrā, to share the same symbiosis. When both stars are simultaneously active, they bestow ample amounts of artistry and skill in creative design.

Tvaṣṭā actually takes two concrete forms in the universe. One, named Viśvakarmā, creates for the gods. The other, named Maya, creates for the anti-gods.²⁰

Viśvakarmā literally means “the one who creates everything.” Māyā (which derives from the root, *maya*) means “art, extraordinary talent.” The word then refers to “magic” and from there to “sorcery, trickery and illusion.” As Viśvakarmā and Maya, Tvaṣṭā creates many fantastic beings and all the art, magic and technology of the gods and anti-gods. These creations fascinate, bewilder and confound all who look upon them.

Wondrous Creations

Citrā is the star of architects, designers and engineers. Here are some details Citrā’s deity, Viśvakarmā, to help drive this point home, illustrating how much expertise with technology, details, designs, etc. resides in Citrā.

Viṣṇu Purāna (1.15) describes Viśvakarmā as the chief designer of all the buildings, parks, statues and artwork in paradise. He created for the

²⁰ The original name, Tvaṣṭā, can be used for either but in practice seems to always refer to Maya. Some accounts (Viṣṇu Purāna 1.15 and Kathāsarit Sāgara Kālabaka.8) describe Maya as the “son” of Viśvakarmā, indicating that the creator for the gods created the creator for the anti-gods. Besides Maya, another son of Viśvakarmā is Nala, a monkey who designed the bridge that spanned from India to Lanka, which Rāma used to attack Rāvaṇa.

An interesting contention is that Maya built great cities in what is now Latin America, founded the Mayan culture, and created their calendar. The classic Indian astronomy textbook, Sūrya Siddhānta is said to be explained by the Sun god to Maya.

gods all their jewelry, their most advanced weapons, and their aircraft. He even designed the mechanisms by which the planets and stars move about in the heavens.

Mahābhārata speaks often of Viśvakarmā. Sabhā.8.34 states that Viśvakarmā designed and built the palace of Yama, god of Bharaṇī. Sabhā.9.2 says that he designed and built the underwater palace of Varuṇa, god of Śatabhiṣaj. Sabhā.11.31 says that the universal creator Brahmā, god of Rohiṇī, keeps Viśvakarmā nearby at all times, calling upon his skill frequently.

Viśvakarmā's amazing technology includes airships, which some interpret as "spaceships." The Ramāyaṇa and Mahābhārata (Vana.161.37) state that he made his most famous airship *out of flowers* and gave it to Brahmā as a gift.²¹

Flying Cities

The Mastyā and Śiva Purāṇas say that Maya created three flying cities for the anti-gods. The first was made of iron and hovered just above the surface of the earth. The second was made of silver and flew in the air. The third was made of gold and soared in space, above the clouds. The three cities moved in such a way that they would align in a straight line only once every thousand years; and only at this time could a single missile be shot through all of them. The cities had no other vulnerability.

The anti-gods and their compatriots flourished and prospered in this unassailable triple city and thus the balance of power in the world was upset. To counteract this Viśvakarmā (Tvaṣṭā amongst the gods) created a flying battleship and a deadly missile using the powers and weapons

²¹ Brahmā gave it in turn to Kuvera, the God of Wealth. Later, it was stolen from Kuvera by the powerful demon, Rāvaṇa, along with the golden city of Lanka (which was also designed by Viśvakarmā).

of the gods as building materials. From this battleship, Śiva successfully destroyed the three flying cities.²²

The Ultimate Weapon: “God’s Thunderbolt”

Here is another story involving both forms of Tvaṣṭā, Maya and Viśvakarmā, showing their mastery of technology and design. The story, from Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (6.7-12), began in the chapter on Puṣya, where we heard how Indra insulted Bṛhaspati and was abandoned by him.

Without his priest, Indra could not gain power by performing rituals, so the demons took over paradise. Brahmā advised Indra to go to Maya’s son, a three-headed entity named Viśvarūpa, and request him to become the priest of the Gods.

Viśvarūpa reluctantly accepted the request and taught Indra how to wear the “Nārāyaṇa Kavaca” – a mystical coat of armor composed of *mantra* (incantations) dedicated to Viṣṇu. With this protection, Indra could drive the anti-gods out from paradise.

Viśvarūpa, however, secretly sent a portion of the ritual offerings to empower his relatives among anti-gods. When Indra discovered this, he furiously decapitated Viśvarūpa’s three heads.

Hearing the fate of his son, Maya became enraged and created an extremely terrible and gigantic monster called Vṛtra. Powerful Vṛtra stormed into paradise and swallowed all the weapons cast at him by the gods. Completely hopeless and on the verge of disaster, the gods beseeched Viṣṇu’s aid.

Viṣṇu told them that the spiritual armor Indra received from Viśvarūpa had been learned from his father, Maya, who got it from the Aśvinī twins, who learned it from a sage named Dadhīci.²³ Dadhīci’s body

²² **Mahābhārata** Karṇa.34.16 specifies that the ship was designed and built by Viśvakarmā.

²³ For the fuller story, see the chapter on Aśvinī.

possessed extreme power as a result of mastering the use of this spiritual armor. Viṣṇu told them to ask Dadhīci to give them his body, and then ask Viśvakarmā to create a special “thunderbolt” weapon from the crushed bones of Dadhīci. This weapon, Viṣṇu said, could destroy the huge and otherwise indestructible Vṛtra.

Dadhīci gave his body in charity, happy to follow the will of Viṣṇu and become liberated from this world. Viśvakarmā then created a unique thunderbolt weapon from Dadhīci’s bones. Indra and his powerful armies rode out to a terrible and devastating war with the hosts of anti-gods. In the end Vṛtra, being an enlightened soul, allowed Indra to kill him with the special thunderbolt and attained liberation.²⁴

Replica Worlds

Tvaṣṭā can even create replicas of other lands and worlds!

Brahmā Purāna says that a sage named Ātreya once requested Viśvakarmā to build him a duplicate version of the god’s paradise and Viśvakarmā did so.

Brhāt Bhāgavatāmṛta by Sanātana Gosvāmī (a relatively recent work) says that Viśvakarmā even created a replica of the spiritual paradise, Vṛṇḍāvana – the abode of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He built it near Kṛṣṇa’s city, Dvārakā, so that Kṛṣṇa could use it to ease the pain of separation from his beloved childhood home.

The Ultimate Palace

Mahābhārata (Ādi.226) tells the story of how Maya came to build the ultimate royal home:

Agñi, the god of fire, once got indigestion from consuming too many ritual offerings. Brahmā told him that the herbs, roots and creatures of a forest named Khandava would cure his ailment. But every time Agñi

²⁴ In the seminal Vedic version of this story, Vṛtra represents storms and darkness and Indra uses a thunderbolt to bring light into the darkness and cause the clouds to bring forth nourishing rains.

tried to consume the forest in flames, torrential downpours put out the fire. The forest was protected by Indra, god of rains and the chief of heaven, because several important allies of his lived within it.

Unable to defeat Indra's rains, Agñi went to Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, who had recently built a prosperous city on the outskirts of the forest, and requested their help. He offered them gifts of divine weapons and appealed to their desire to rid the world of evil (hosts of ferocious demons and monsters flourished in the forest). Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa agreed to help Agñi.

Agñi began to consume the forest and Arjuna made an umbrella of arrows above it, blocking Indra's rain.

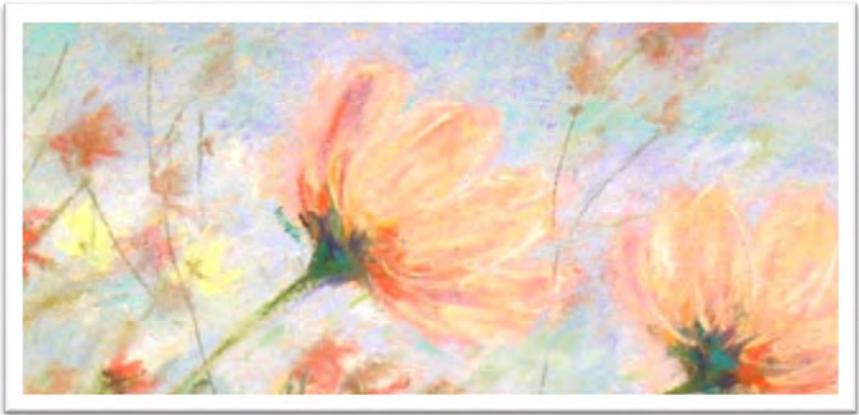
Furious, Indra came with all the major gods to fight Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. The demons of the forest joined forces with them. Maya was involved, and hurled huge slabs of mountainside at Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. But the not even the combined forces of gods and anti-gods could overcome Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Thus Angi successfully consumed the forest.

During the battle Maya surrendered to the protection of Arjuna and became an ally. In gratitude for Arjuna accepting his surrender he constructed a palace for Arjuna and the Pāṇḍavas that combined the best art, magic and technology of heaven, earth, and the underworld.

Peaceful forest groves flowered *within* the palace, and their fragrance spread on well-designed breezes (air conditioning). The centerpiece of the hall was a lake with living flowers made of gems and a surface that blended so seamlessly with the marble shoreline that many visitors to the palace unwittingly fell into the pool, being unable to tell the difference between the floor and the water.

Citrā is the star of detailed blueprints, refined skill, multiple talents and an ability to comprehend and give shape to many angles of a single subject. Through Citrā, Tvaṣṭā empowers humanity to create wondrous things that require keen artistic sense, detailed expertise and nearly magical technological skills.

Individuality ~ *Svāti*



Name Svāti

Meaning Self-actuation

Symbol A new bud bending in the wind

Deity Vāyu - god of air

Main Star Arcturus



The main component of the word *svāti* is *sva*, which means *one's own*. The meaning of the name Svāti, therefore, has to do with becoming an individual.²⁵

Svāti's symbol is a new flower bud bending against the strong wind. This is a symbol of "going against the grain" and making the effort to stand out on our own as an individual.

The deity of Svāti is Vāyu, god of the wind that blows upon the new bud, making it strong. We will discover that Vāyu is the god of Prāṇa, which creates individuality in material beings.

"Individuality" is the key word for Svāti.

Power

Since Vāyu is the god of the mighty wind, he is extremely powerful. He once held a contest of strength with the Nāga king, Vāsuki. Vāyu couldn't remove Vāsuki from his grip on a mountain, but neither could Vāsuki escape from Vāyu's grip. Viṣṇu finally called a halt to the exhausting stalemate. When Vāsuki unwound from the mountain Vāyu ripped the peak from its roots and threw it far to the south. It landed in the ocean and became the isle of Lanka.

Vāyu is also the father of the mighty warriors Hanuman and Bhīma.

The Breath of Life

Though Vāyu is powerful, he is no brute of hurricanes and storms. He is not the god of *wind* so much as the god of *air* and of *breath*. Rg Veda (10.9) says that Vāyu is the *breath* of Godhead.

In modern terms, Vāyu is the god of oxygen. Rg Veda (1.7.112) says that Vāyu is the father of Agñi. This is because fire (Agñi) cannot burn without oxygen (Vāyu).

²⁵ The word *svāti* also means *sword*, because a sword is a blade, and blades cut things to destroy homogeneity and create individualized divisions.

Brhadaranyaka Upanishad illustrates that nothing is more essential to life than Vāyu / oxygen:

The gods of the human body held a contest to see who among them was the most important. Selecting a man to serve as the arena for their contest, one by one the different deities left that man's body. When the god of vision left, the man became blind and morose. Similarly when other deities abandoned him the man lost important functions. But when Vāyu stood up to leave the man, *every* deity of the body became uprooted and forced to leave, too. Vāyu sat back down and everyone returned to normal. Everyone admitted that nothing is more important to an individual's existence than Vāyu: god of breath.

Our existence as an individual rests upon Vāyu's power: "life air" (*prāṇa* or, perhaps, oxygen in modern terms). Here are several quotes illustrating this.

Katha Upanishad (1.3.1) says:

"The individual soul floats on the life-air in the core of the individual."

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (4.29.71) says:

"Without life-air we lose our sense of 'I.' This temporarily happens in deep sleep, unconsciousness, or in terrible shock such as extremely high fever and during death."

Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.9 says:

"The wise perceive the individual soul floating on five life-airs. The true individual does not manifest until it is purified of contact with those airs."

Indian thought holds the life-air to be a bridge element between matter and spirit. It is a type of rope which ties the conscious spirit to an individual body and identity, creating an ego divorced and separated from the divine whole.

The intimate relationship between breath and ego is why a significant portion of classical *yoga* is devoted to breathing techniques. It also supports the concept that natal birth chart should be created for the moment of a child's *first breath*. It is the moment of the child's first contact with Vāyu that is the foundation of their individuality and individual destiny.²⁶

The quote from Mundaka Upanishad suggests that there is another individuality which is "purified." When the soul exists without the life-air it experiences an identity that is not separated from the divine whole.

Yet another book, the Chandogya Upanishad, states that spiritual realization is impossible until one conceives of the individualizing life-air in a spiritual manner, integrated with the divine whole:

"One cannot know Brahman without knowing Vāyu as 'om.'"

*Svāti is "ego." It is the ability to establish a definition of "I."
Without Svāti we are unable to clearly individualize ourselves.
The ultimate potential of Svāti is self-realization: it empowers
humans to develop an ego that is integrated into the divine
whole.*

Vāyu and the Silk-Cotton Tree

Mahābhārata (Śānti.154-156) tells a story involving Vāyu and reminiscent of Svāti's symbol, illustrating the pride of false-ego and inflated individuality:

There was once a silk-cotton tree so huge that its branches would not move in any storm, nor would even a single leaf or flower fall. A great sage, Nārada, took shelter of this tree during a storm and, amazed, praised the tree's power. The tree became very proud and came to consider itself more powerful than Vāyu.

²⁶ It can therefore be inferred that prior to the first breath the child has not established the fundamentals of a bond to his or her new body and is still largely immersed in a trans-lifetime state of awareness.

Hearing of this, Vāyu came and said, “You fool! If you are strong, fight me here and now!” Vāyu blew off all the tree’s fruits, flowers and leaves. He then explained to the humiliated tree, “Long ago, Brahmā rested in your shade. Out of deference to the sacred place I have always stilled my winds near you. It is not your power that made you great, it was my grace!”

Svāti empowers the self to be an individual, but the risk of individualism is egoism. So we must always remember that the powers and qualities that make us a unique individual are granted to us by the powers of the universe. We should not proudly think of ourselves as completely individual and disconnected from the divine whole.

Obsession ~ *Viśākhā*



- Name** Viśākhā
Meaning One-pointed
Symbol Finish line
Deity Indrāgñi - god of sacrificial fire
Main Stars α , β , γ and ι Librae



The root of the word Viśākhā is *śākhā*, which means *branch, division, or fork*. The prefix *vi* indicates something that is: *apart from, distinct, intense, and opposite*.

A branch or fork represents a decision. So *śākhā* means a decision. Adding the prefix *vi-* indicates being intensely and distinctly decisive, not at all straying here and there on many different forks in the road. I translate *viśākhā* as “One-pointed.”

Sanskrit Lexicographers state that *viśākhā* is a term for an archer’s ideal attitude in shooting a bow. He selects a target, aims carefully, and does not waver in the least.

The most famous archer of Indian lore is Arjuna. It is said that when he would aim his arrow he would not even see anything except the exact spot at which he was aiming. This nicely illustrates the decisive focus *Viśākhā* can impart to us.

The symbol of *Viśākhā* is a finish line, a *target, a goal*. I think the appropriateness is obvious.

Viśākhā grants the ability to stay on course and make it as straight as possible to the finish line, the goal of the journey.

There is a famous verse in Bhagavad-Gita (2.41) using the word *(vi)śākhā* and illustrating a spiritual application of being “one-pointed”:

*vyavasāyātmikā buddhir ekeha kuru-nandana
bahu-śākhā hy anantās ca buddhayo ‘vyavasāyinām*

“[Spiritualists] have unwavering and one-pointed determination, O Son of Kuru; not the unlimited indecisiveness of many-branched ambition.”

The nature of Viśākhā is fixation and decisive dedication.

The Power to Get Things Done

Viśākhā's deity is Indrāgñi. Some people suggest that Indrāgñi refers to two different gods: Indra and Agñi taken together. However, Mahābhārata and Ṛg Veda treat Indrāgñi as a single deity.

For example, Ṛg Veda (3.12) is a prayer to Indrāgñi. Mahābhārata (Sabha.11) mentions Indrāgñi in the course of describing all the supernatural beings that attend Brahmā. Two forms of fire attend the Creator: Agñisoma and Indrāgñi. These are the two forms of fire required for religious rituals. Agñisoma is at Brahmā's service so that the Creator can have health and vitality (the principles of Soma) to live as long as the creation. Indrāgñi is at Brahmā's service so that he can obtain divine intelligence and power by worshipping Viṣṇu.²⁷

As you can see, there are many different types of fire (*agñi*). The foremost (*indra*) is the fire used in sacrifices and rituals. Thus, Indrāgñi is the god of ritual fire.

We must put ourselves in a Vedic mindset before we can really understand what the god of ritual fire has to do with Viśākhā, the star of singular and decisive dedication to a goal. *In Vedic culture, rituals are not irrelevant rites or obscure religious observances. They are the means to obtain what you desire!* Whatever you desire, there is a Vedic ritual that grants you the merit to have your desire fulfilled by providence.

Viśākhā is all about decisive commitment to an objective, and Indrāgñi is the god that enables us to achieve that objective.

Viśākhā creates strong dedication to objectives and the ability to achieve those goals. Viśākhā can give rise to Machiavellian ideals, such as "the end justifies the means" or similar convictions such as, "by any means necessary."

²⁷ As per the statement of Bhāgavata Purāṇa (1.1.1): "Brahmā receives intelligence from Viṣṇu."

Goddess Viśākhā & Rādhā

According to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava concept, a goddess named Viśākhā attends the primordial fountainhead of all goddesses, Śrī Rādhā. Her role is to help goddess Rādhā make decisions and keep her divine determination fixed.

Considering Atharva Veda (19.7), it is quite likely that the original name of Viśākhā nakṣatra was “Rādhā.” It forms a pair with the next nakṣatra, Anurādhā.

Devotion ~ *Anurādhā*



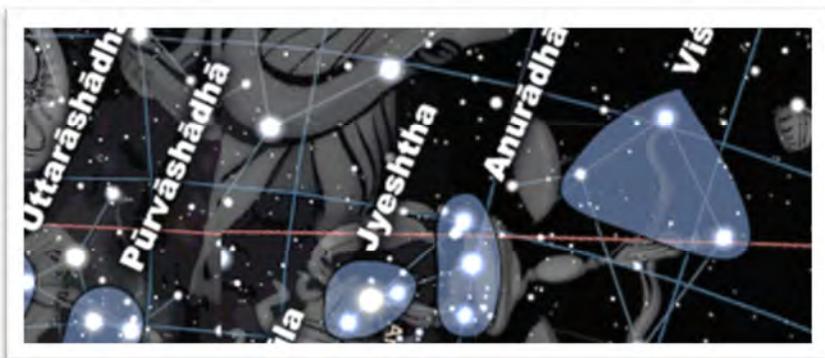
Name Anurādhā

Meaning Devotion

Symbol A flower on the finish line

Deity Mitra - god of devotion & friendship

Main Stars β , δ and π Scorpionis



Anurādhā shares a symbol with the previous star, Viśākhā. This is the second time we have come across a pair of stars sharing a symbol. The first was Pūrva and Uttara Phālgunī. If we consider that the original name of Viśākhā may very likely have been Rādhā, it's pairing with Anurādhā becomes more obvious.

The prefix *anu-* means “after, under, near, following, next, and towards.” If Viśākhā is originally “Rādhā” then the literal meaning of the name for the next star is obvious: *Anu-Rādhā*, “The star that follows Rādhā.”

Viśākhā is the star of singular dedication and Anurādhā is very similar, it is the star of deep *devotion*. The word *rādhā* means, “gifts and favors” and is derived from the word *arādhāna*, “adoration & devotion.” Both stars in this pair are similar in their single-minded dedication, but Anurādhā differs from Viśākhā in that her single-minded dedication is especially motivated by love and devotion. It is therefore fitting that Anurādhā's symbol differs slightly from Viśākhā's: it is also a finish line, but has the addition of a *flower* – a symbol of love and devotion.

The deity empowering Anurādhā is Mitra, the Vedic god of devotion and friendship.

Love is the Inspiration

The first part of Mitra, *mi-*, means to “bring together.” The second part, *-tra*, means “instrument.” So Mitra is the god that “brings people together.” The word Mitra comes to mean “friend” because friendship brings people together and binds them to one another. Mitra is the “instrument of coming together,” the god of friendship and love.

We can also derive this word from the root *mid-* (“to endear”) and the suffix *-tra*, so that *mitra* means “the vehicle of endearment”, love.

Rg Veda thoroughly praises Mitra. There is one hymn in particular, the 59th of the 3rd book, that is uniquely directed at Mitra without his usual companion Varuṇa:

Mitra's words inspire us to action
Mitra sustains heaven and earth.
Mitra looks on us with eyes that never close.
Let this offering of sacred butter go to Mitra.

Now read that again substituting "love" for the name Mitra. Love is the inspiration to action. Love sustains heaven and earth: all beings, even the gods, are sustained by love. The glance of a lover upon the beloved curses its own blinking, which removes the beloved from sight for a moment. Such is the glance of Mitra.

Anurādhā is the star where love acts as the inspiration for all actions. It is a star of tenderness, romance, and the need to give and receive affection.

Love is the Law

The same section of Ṛg Vedas continues and says, "O Mitra, we strive to live by your principles."

This indicates that Vedic people strove to live by the principles of love, and they made their laws on that basis, considering love to be the essence of all rules and laws. In fact, "the instrument that brings together" (*mitra*) is "that which binds." Agreements, laws and promises are therefore a form of love. Thus Mitra, the god of affection and love, is also the god of principles and contracts.

Anurādhā abides by agreements, promises, and laws, as a result of affection and love for what those principles represent.

Glory of Love

I'll continue to tell you key sections of this hymn to Mitra. Whenever you read the word "Mitra" remember the word "love."

Mitra is adorable and auspicious
From the very beginning.
He is gracious, generous and kind.

Mitra is most deserving of praise.

Mitra's grace brings *true* gains.
Inspiring us to achieve *true* glory.
Mitra's glory is well-known.
It overpowers heaven.
It surpasses the ends of the earth.

Regardless of race,
Everyone seeks Mitra's shelter
Which is always strong
And sustains even the gods.

Mitra nourishes everyone
Gods, men, priests alike.
He is the fulfillment of sacred law.

Love and Lust

Mitra forms a pair with Varuṇa. We will learn about Varuṇa in detail when we come to his star – Śatabhiṣa. For now, suffice to say that Varuṇa is the god of the underworld, and therefore represents the “lower polarity.” Mitra is a solar deity, the “higher polarity.” One example of this polarity is seeing Mitra as the daytime and Varuṇa as the night. There is another example that is much more relevant to Anurādhā.

Love has two polarities: love (selfless) and lust (selfish). In Sanskrit, *prema* is selfless love, and *kāma* is selfish love, lust. Mitra is love - meant to bring joy to others and bind us to others. Varuṇa is lust - meant to bring joy to oneself and to bind others to us.

Anurādhā is Mitra's star of devotional dedication. It is impossible to totally separate selfless and selfish love, but the true aim and impetus of Anurādhā is towards *prema*, selfless love.

The following amazing story from Uttara Rāma Carita (and referred to in Mahābhārata Śānti.88.343) illustrates this:

Mitra-Varuṇa had kept themselves in a single body and were wandering on the seashore when they happened to meet Urvaśī, the most delightful and attractive damsel of paradise. They made love, and Urvaśī conceived.

Mitra-Varuṇa then separated into distinct bodies, in disagreement of how to proceed. Varuṇa again propositioned Urvaśī for sex, but she disliked his greed for it and rejected him in favor of Mitra. Varuṇa, however, couldn't contain his excitement and ejaculated involuntarily.

This made Urvaśī feel sorry for rejecting a man in such need. She therefore collected the semen and put it into an artificial womb. She also discharged her newly fertilized egg and put that into the artificial womb as well. In a few days two children emerged: the great sages Agastya and Vaisiṣṭha.

Rādhārāṇī

Viśākhā and Anurādhā nakṣatra were known as “The two Rādhā's” in Vedic times. It is impossible to write about these stars without at least referencing the Supreme Goddess of late-classical Vaiṣṇavism: Rādhā, honorifically addressed as Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.

The dedication of Śrī Rādhā for her beloved Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the pinnacle of the Mitra-Varuṇa polarity where *prema* completely transforms *kāma*; and is the highest realization of Mitra's essential principle: love as the supreme law.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu composed a verse beautifully expressing the infinitely selfless love of Śrī Rādhā for Śrī Kṛṣṇa:

*āśliṣya vā pāda-ratām pinaṣṭu mām
adarśanān marma-hatām karotu vā*

*yathā tathā vā vidadhātu lampāṭo
mat-prāṇa-nāthas tu sa eva nāparaḥ*

Maybe he will embrace me,
Maybe he will trample me underfoot,
Or perhaps he will simply break my heart by not showing up at
all...

That Libertine can do anything he likes,
But he will always be the only lord of my life's breath!

Eminence ~ *Jyeṣṭhā*



Name Jyeṣṭhā

Meaning Foremost

Symbol Earring, umbrella or amulet

Deity Indra – Chief of the gods

Main Stars Antares and the stars closeby



The word *jyeṣṭhā* means, “chief, best, greatest, first, eldest.” Indra is the deity of Jyeṣṭhā, and the words *indra* and *jyeṣṭhā* are synonyms. Both mean “eldest” in the sense of being first and foremost. Indra is “Jyeṣṭhā” - He is the firstborn of the gods.

The title “Indra” is also given to the Supreme Godhead Viṣṇu, for it generically means “the best, the first, the eldest.” Generally, however, as a proper noun it refers to a god who is the king of paradise.

Vedic literature has three main branches, each of which encapsulates a specific aspect of Indian culture. The Veda themselves represent ritualistic, materialistic culture. The Upanishads represent scientific and philosophical culture. The Puranas represent devotional culture. Indra is of *prime importance* – the God of Gods – in the Vedas, but his position is diminished significantly in the Upanishads and Puranas. This is because of what Indra inherently *is*. He is the king of paradise, the ultimate trademark of a living being enjoying life to its fullest extent. Thus his divinity is of unsurpassed significance for the ritualistic materialism dominating the Veda. But in the philosophical Upanishads and devotional Puranas his light is dimmed tremendously.

The Rg Veda presents Indra as being very handsome and of golden complexion. In his hand is a weapon of thunderbolts, made by the divine architect Tvaṣṭā. The wind himself, Vāyu, drives Indra’s brilliant golden chariot through the heavens (thus Indra is one of the 8 original solar-deities, Ādityas, of Rg Veda). He constantly drinks Soma and is therefore exceedingly powerful and delighted.

The Purāṇas, however, focus far more on his flaws. This is because the Purāṇas downplay what Indra intrinsically represents: the height of self-oriented enjoyment and prosperity. So throughout the Purāṇa we find tale after tale of Indra getting into trouble and making proud mistakes.

A particularly poignant story in this regard is told in Padma Purāṇa 1.56:

Indra fell in love with the beautiful wife of a powerful yogi (Gautama). He assumed the form of her husband and came to her saying, “Lust has taken hold of me, let’s make love!”

The yogi knew what was happening so he rushed back to his hermitage. When he saw Indra enjoying his wife, he cursed the god, “You seem to be so dedicated to vagina that you will do anything, no matter how wrong, to enjoy one; here then, let one thousand vaginas cover your body, and let your balls fall off!”

Indra went to bathe in a sacred lake and pray to goddess Lakṣmī for a cure.

She said, “Even I cannot undo the curse of a true yogi and sage! But I can modify it to your advantage. In each vagina let there be an eye – so you will be covered not with 1000 vaginas but with 1000 eyes! And for testicles, I bless you to have those of a ram!”

Indra throughout the Stars

Being the king of the gods, Indra’s relevance spans through many stars.

In Aśvinī’s chapter we read about how Indra wanted to keep certain knowledge from getting out, but the Aśvinī twins circumvented him. In that chapter we also heard how Indra wanted to prevent the Aśvinī from drinking Soma, but the sage Cyavana convinced Indra otherwise.

In Kṛttikā’s chapter we heard about the birth of Kārtikeya. Prior to the beginning of that story, Indra sent Kāmadeva (god of lust) to Śiva to incite him to procreate (as you might recall, the Gods needed a child from Śiva to defeat the anti-god that was destroying them). Śiva opened his third eye and burned Kāmadeva (who since that time has no physical body), thus Indra’s attempt was foiled.

In this chapter we also heard how Agñi and Indra together tested the extent of King Śibi’s charitable nature.

In Mṛgaśīrṣā's chapter we learned about Soma, the drink that primarily belongs to Indra.

In Punarvasu's chapter we learned about Indra's mother, Aditi. And we learned that she had Indra destroy her sister's unborn child before he could become Indra's rival.

From this early event Indra developed intolerance rivals. This is an important part of Indra's character, and an important part of Indra's star, Jyeṣṭhā.

In Puṣya's chapter we learned about Indra's high priest, Bṛhaspati. We heard how Indra insulted Bṛhaspati and then suffered defeat by the anti-gods on account of losing his favor.

In Citrā's chapter we learned how Tvaṣṭā eventually saved Indra from this predicament, and created Indra's thunderbolt weapon. In this chapter we also heard that Indra was defeated by Arjuna²⁸ and Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

In Āśleṣā's chapter we learned about the Nāga. An important Nāga is Tākṣaka, who was a friend of Indra, and for whose sake Indra protected the Khaṇḍava forest and thus wound up having to battle and be defeated by Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa.

Symbols of Jyeṣṭhā

The primary symbol of Jyeṣṭhā is an amulet / talisman. Secondarily, an earring and umbrella symbolize this nakṣatra.

The amulet literally is the mystical armor, *nārāyaṇa-kavaca*, discussed in Citrā's chapter while explaining how Indra managed to defeat Vṛtra.

As for the earring and umbrella, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (10.59) tells a relevant tale:

²⁸ Arjuna is Indra's own son. His mother is the human, Kuntī.

A person going by the name Narakāsura became so powerful that he attacked paradise. In an act of defiance and insult he stole Indra’s royal umbrella and the earrings of his mother, Aditi.

Indra sought the help of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who along with his courageous wife Satyabhāmā mounted the great eagle, Garuḍa, and flew directly into battle. They destroyed Naraka and returned the stolen umbrella and earrings to Indra.

Indra invited them to enjoy his hospitality in paradise. While there, Aditi taught many paradisiac arts to Satyabhāmā. While leaving she requested from Kṛṣṇa a flower from Indra’s most beautiful tree. When Kṛṣṇa took this flower without asking, Indra became insulted and had to be defeated in a battle with Kṛṣṇa, who took the *entire tree* in the end!

Jyeṣṭhā empowers humans to become like Indra: to be best, first, foremost, and kingly. It also has flaws similar to the flaws Indra possesses: to be intoxicated by power.

Indra, Kṛṣṇa, and the Umbrella-Mountain

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (10.24-27) tells another story relating to Indra and the umbrella symbolism of Jyeṣṭhā. It is the story of Kṛṣṇa’s lifting Mount Govardhana to protect his friends and family from Indra’s anger:

Śrī Kṛṣṇa grew up among cowherders. One day when he was six or seven years old, he saw his father and the men of the village busy doing something apparently very important.

“Dad, what is going on?” He asked.

“Don’t worry, go play with your friends!”

“You have to educate me!” Kṛṣṇa replied.

His father smiled, full of affection. Other’s came over to enjoy the conversation. “We are preparing for an important sacrifice,” his father explained.

“For who?” Kṛṣṇa asked.

“For Indra.”

“Why?” Kṛṣṇa asked.

“Because we are farmers and Indra is the god who controls the rain.”

“Dad, have you ever *seen* Indra?” Kṛṣṇa asked?

His father was at a loss for words, so Kṛṣṇa continued, “You say Indra is responsible for our well-being, but we don’t even see him. And what’s more we see rain falling on the ocean where no one ever worships Indra.”

The men were dumbfounded to hear a young child speak like this.

“I see cows!” Kṛṣṇa said. “I see rivers. I see grasses, vegetables, trees and fruits. I see teachers and philosophers. All these things I can really see are the things that are responsible for our well-being! Don’t worship Indra, worship them!”

“But son,” Kṛṣṇa’s father said, “If we neglect the gods we will make them angry.”

“Don’t worry about any of that!” said Kṛṣṇa cheerfully. And he was so charming that all the men actually changed their plans and used all the ingredients of Indra’s sacrifice to instead worship the animals and people in nature that were directly supporting and nourishing them.

It was an enormously festive occasion, but Indra was wondering where his sacrifice was. He became furious when he observed all the villagers listening to a young boy telling them not to bother worshipping Indra. He called forth his most powerful storm clouds and sent them to Kṛṣṇa’s village, Vṛṇḍāvana.

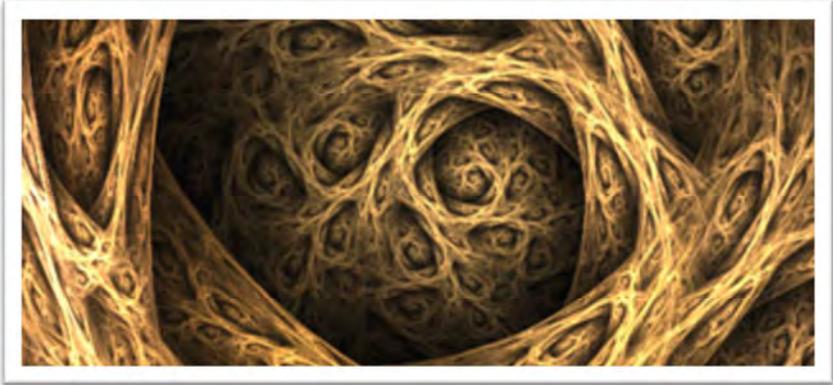
The villagers became extremely fearful when the terrible storms let loose torrential downpours. They rushed to Kṛṣṇa for protection. He

lifted the local mountain, Mount Govardhana and held it aloft for seven days on the pinky finger of his left hand, creating an umbrella under which the entire village was kept dry and safe.

Realizing Kṛṣṇa to be Viṣṇu himself, Indra stopped the storms and hurried to apologize. Because he brought the cow of paradise with him, Kṛṣṇa's heart was softened and he forgave the king of the gods.

Jyeṣṭhā's higher nature is to empower human beings to shelter and protect others, like Kṛṣṇa did by lifting the umbrella of Mount Govardhana, like a king ("Indra") does for his citizens, and like the eldest ("Jyeṣṭhā") does for his siblings.

Uprooting ~ *Mūla*



Name Mūla

Meaning Root

Symbol Tangled roots

Deity Nirṛti - goddess of destruction

Main Stars The tail of the Scorpion



The Sanskrit word *mūla* means, “Root, bottom, foundation, origin, beginning, and primary.” It even refers to a “corpse,” perhaps because the body is the *root* of ego and of our connection to a world that is always in a state of destruction.

Its connection to “roots” is a symbol that reveals Mūla’s proclivity towards herbalism, medicines and drugs. It also expresses Mūla’s penchant for seeking the origin, beginning, and unseen root of things.

Mūla belongs to the goddess Nirṛti, the goddess of destruction. The word *nirṛti* has two parts *nir-* and *ṛta*. *Ṛta* means, “true, luminous, proper, right, lawful.” The prefix, *nir-*, means, “without.” So, Nirṛti means “unlawful, improper, dark, false, and evil.”

Mūla impels humanity towards lawlessness and an untamed spirit.

Mahābhārata (Adi.66.54) depicts Nirṛti as the wife of Adharma (Immorality). They have three sons, Bhaya (Fear), Mahā-Bhaya (Terror), and Antaka (Murder).

Agñi Purāna (chapter 51) says that Nirṛti should be worshipped wielding a sword and riding on a donkey. Devī Bhāgavata (8th division) says that she dwells in a city called “Ink Black” (“Kṛṣṇāñjana”), and is the guardian of the South-East, a direction symbolic of pain and suffering.

Nirṛti the Destroyer has both a male and female form, a “Rudra” and “Rudrāṇī.” The chapter on Rudra’s star, Ārdrā, has much to say which is pertinent to Ārdrā’s sister-star, Mūla. In particular it’s important to recall that the Howling Destroyer (Rudra) becomes the Auspicious One (Śiva) after directing his attention to spiritual pursuits.

Mūla provides impetuses and resources that are very well suited for spiritual paths. It therefore inspires humanity towards spiritual pursuit: seeking the root of all things, destroying illusions, and going beyond the limitations of what is superficial.

Transforming Destruction into Auspiciousness

Atharva Veda (5.7) depicts Nirṛti in two forms: one is horrific and ghoulish, while the other is blonde, fair, golden-clad and wealthy:

Misfortune, go far away!
We deflect your arrow!
We know you well, Nirṛti! Oppressor, destroyer!
A wild, naked woman haunting our dreams,
Confusing and baffling us

I respect you, blonde Nirṛti
Vast as all of space
Full of auspiciousness, golden-complexioned,
reclining on gold, dressed in gold,
I respect you.

The first form of Nirṛti is unfortunate, baffling and confusing. It is an oppressive, destructive, naked undead who haunts our thoughts. The second is auspicious, golden, blonde and spread throughout space.

Mūla is fearsome and destroys us. But when we respect the function of destruction as a necessary stage prior to a new creation, we receive auspicious and beneficial energy from Mūla.

When destruction takes place things are flattened and laid low, razed to the ground, only the roots remain. Corpses or their ashes are put underground, or into water so that they soak into the earth. Destruction (Nirṛti) is intimately tied to what is low and deep (Mūla).

The goddess of destruction works through Mūla. Few people seek destruction, but it is nonetheless an essential part of the balance of nature. It would be good to review the chapters on Bharaṇī (star of the god of death) and Ārdrā (star of the god of destruction and storms) to remember how negative things are essential to positive things.

Through Mūla we can destroy all that deserves destruction. We can seek our true origin, our true root, and destroy all that is superficial.

The Invincible ~ *Pūrvā Aṣāḍhā*



Name Pūrvā Aṣāḍhā

Meaning Invincible (I)

Symbol Elephant tusk, fan

Deity Āpas - goddess of water

Main Stars δ and ϵ Sagittarii



The Aṣāḍhā stars are the third of the four nakṣatra *pairs* in the Vedic sky. Pūrva Aṣāḍhā is, of course, the first star in this pair: which is composed two groups of parallel stars that reminded the Vedic people of two elephant tusks.

Aṣāḍhā means, *invincible*. Elephant tusks are certainly invincible. They smash through anything that stands in their way, but Pūrva Aṣāḍhā is not like a bulldozer. Another symbol for it is a fan – something that keeps us cool and calm. Continuing the theme of being cool, calm and refreshed, the deity of Pūrva Aṣāḍhā is the goddess of water: “Āpas.”

There is a close relation between Āpas and the following gods:

- Varuṇa, god of the waters. Āpas is Varuṇa’s wife.
- Soma, the ultimate liquid; ambrosia of the gods which grants unsurpassed health and enjoyment.
- Indra, god of rains.
- Agñi, god of fire, since fire “enters into” water to rest and recuperate.²⁹

Rg Veda (7.49) is a prayer to Āpas which makes these connections quite clear:

From the sea comes the waters (Āpas) of the flowing rivers;
Never sleeping, always cleansing.
Their paths dug by Indra, the thunderous bull.
Goddesses, protect me!

Waters from heaven
Waters from earth
Waters from below the surface
Bright, purifying, speeding towards the ocean.
Goddesses, protect me!

²⁹ H2O separates into Hydrogen and Oxygen which are both highly flammable.

Within you goes mighty Varuṇa
Who tells morality from immorality.
From you comes Soma – bright and purifying.
Goddesses, protect me!

From you mighty Varuṇa, Soma, and all gods drink
and gain strength and vigor.
Into you goes fire (Agñi).
Goddesses, protect me!

Thus, Pūrva Aṣāḍhā is thematically harmonious with:

- Śatabhiṣaj, Varuṇa's star
- Mṛgaśīrṣā, Soma's star
- Jyeṣṭhā, Indra's star
- Kṛttikā, Agñi's star

The word Āpas refers directly to water *itself*. The goddess of water can be more personally addressed as Vāruṇī. Padma Purāṇa (Bhūmi.119) says that when the gods and anti-gods churned the ocean of milk, by Varuṇa's efforts four goddesses appeared from the ocean: Sulakṣmī, Vāruṇī, Kāmodā and Śreṣṭhā. Vāruṇī married Varuṇa and became the goddess of water, Āpas.

Purifying, Nourishing and Delicious

Rg Veda (7.47) describes water (Āpas):

O Āpas, grant us today the purest refreshment
Found in the sacred beverage of the king of gods
Richly sweet, and soundly nourishing.

O Āpas, child of floods, whose course is rapid,
Protect us with a wave of that delicious drink
Which makes the king of the gods and all the gods joyful.
Grant us this today.

[This treats water as being nearly identical to Soma, the divine beverage, and being therefore very dear to Indra, the king of the gods.]

O Āpas, the rivers joyfully purify us
They are goddesses, paths flowing to the gods.
Always obeying divine law,
We offer our buttered-sacrifice to the rivers.

Sūrya's bright rays attract them,
Indra digs the paths they travel
Let these streams give us wide fields and freedom to move.
By your blessing, O gods, let it be.

Strength, Health and Fertility

Rg Veda (10.9) describes Āpas:

O Waters (Āpas) you are beneficent
So bring us energy, to find happiness
Give us your most auspicious liquid
Like a loving mother

We gladly come to you, to carry us swiftly forward
And give us fertility

O Waters, be our drink; Goddesses to aid and delight us
Send us a river of strength and health³⁰

I beg your protection, O Waters
Goddesses of precious things, who control us all

Soma says that all healing comes from water
So also says Agñi, who blesses everyone

O Waters, may your abundant healing keep me healthy
So I may long see the sunlight

³⁰ This line is the mantra recommended in Parashara Hora Shastra as a remedial meditation for Saturn!

Whatever sin is in me, whatever evil I have done,
Whatever lies I have made... O Waters, take it far from me!

O Waters, with this prayer I seek the blessing of your moisture
Send forth Agñi to nourish and bath me in light

The Nature of Pūrva Aṣāḍhā

We know that Pūrva Aṣāḍhā is about strength and victory because *Aṣāḍhā means invincible* and the invincible elephant tusk is one of this star's symbols. But from the symbol of a fan and the nature of Pūrva Aṣāḍhā's deity, *Water*, we learn Pūrva Aṣāḍhā imparts invincibility *like water* – strong enough to destroy stone, yet still soft and cool.

Pūrva Aṣāḍhā is a star of strength through purity. It confers strength and power to mankind, but in a pleasant manner, like the invincible yet appealing power of water. Being both appealing and powerful, Pūrva Aṣāḍhā creates leaders with significant popularity and mass appeal. As Āpas brings together the powers of many gods, Varuṇa, Indra, Soma and Agñi so does Pūrva Aṣāḍhā create people who call pool together a wide range of skills and resources to become successful – though this last trait is even more prominent in the next star, Uttara Aṣāḍhā.

Complete Victory ~ *Uttara Aṣāḍhā*



- Name** Uttara Aṣāḍhā
Meaning Invincible (II)
Symbol Elephant tusk, fan
Deity Viśvedeva - all supernatural powers
Main Stars ζ and σ Sagittarii



Uttara Aṣāḍhā is the second in the Aṣāḍhā pair; the second “elephant tusk.” As with all the paired stars, the second shares all the main themes of the first, with some subtle yet important differences. Uttara Aṣāḍhā is like Pūrva Aṣāḍhā in granting power to humanity, but it differs from the former by being less self-oriented and more inclined to consolidate power and resources from many diverse supporters. This is because the deity of Uttara Aṣāḍhā is not a singular being but a complete plurality of *all* the gods and goddesses.

The invincibility of this second Aṣāḍhā comes from the ability to pull together many divergent resources and make them work for a common purpose.

Both Aṣāḍhā stars are invincible and undefeatable – but Uttara Aṣāḍhā lacks the soft, watery element which made Pūrva Aṣāḍhā’s power more appealing. Thus Uttara Aṣāḍhā appears more *literally* undefeatable and unchallengeable, much like an elephant storming through a gate.

All Inclusive Divinity

Viśva literally means, “all, every.” *Deva* means “divinity.” The fundamental meaning of the word *Viśvadeva* is, “every divinity.”

The Ṛg Veda adopts this meaning and has many prayers directed to all the gods, on the principle that no divinity should be left out from praise. As *Viśvadeva*, all the gods cooperate together under a central deity, usually Indra (see Ṛg 3.54.17).

Viṣṇu Purāṇa and other Purāṇas do not ignore this meaning, but give an additional definition of the *Viśvadeva* as one of nine special groupings of divinity. There are usually 10, sometimes 12, deities counted in this group, all of whom are said to be children of *Viśvā*, one of the daughters of the universe’s genetic engineer, Dakṣa. These deities control the various powers required to be a well-rounded and successful individual.

From either angle, the Viśvadeva empower humanity to draw upon a large pool of resources, and become successful as a

result of being endowed with qualities and skills from diverse sources.

Another effect of drawing power from all sources:

Uttara Aṣādhā empowers human beings to give “110%” to their tasks, drawing all available power and pouring it into each of their endeavors.

Listening Carefully ~ *Śravaṇa*



Name Śravaṇa

Meaning Listening

Symbol Ear, three footprints

Deity Viṣṇu - god of existence

Main Stars Altair and the two nearest stars



Śravaṇa means “the act of acquiring knowledge.” It comes from the root *śru* (“to hear”). We acquire knowledge, literally and figuratively, by *listening* - so *Śravaṇa* means “acquiring knowledge by listening.” An ear is a very straightforward symbol for this star.

Through Śravaṇa humanity becomes good listeners, speakers and audio-smiths.

We have heard a lot about Viṣṇu throughout this book.

- In the chapter on Bharanī we learned how Viṣṇu rescued a person whom he heard calling his name, “Nārāyaṇa.”
- In the chapter on Rohiṇī we learned about Viṣṇu in relation to his “child,” Brahmā. I heartily suggest rereading that section to refresh yourself on its important details pertaining to Viṣṇu.
- In the chapter on Punarvasu we heard how Viṣṇu covered all of existence in three steps. (Another symbol for *Śravaṇa* is three footsteps.)
- In Āśleṣā’s chapter we heard about Viṣṇu in relation to his companion, the dragon Śeṣa.
- In Pūrva Phālgunī’s chapter we heard that Viṣṇu is “Bhagavān” in the fullest sense.

Viṣṇu is the origin of existence itself. The word *viṣṇu* means “that which is everywhere.” Space is everywhere. It is what everything is inside of, and what everything has within it. The sensory wavelength carried by space (according to the science of Saṁkhya) is sound. Sound is what the ear hears. Thus all-pervading Viṣṇu is a perfect fit for *Śravaṇa*, the star of *listening*.

Viṣṇu is also the god that enables us to listen carefully. To listen carefully we need a pensive and clear state of mind. As we learned in the chapter on Rohiṇī, this world has three primary effects on us:

sometimes it excites us to action (*rajas*), sometimes it lulls us to sleep (*tamas*) and sometimes it allows us to be balanced and clear (*sattva*). Brahmā is the god of *rajas*. Rudra / Śiva is the god of *tamas*. Viṣṇu is the god of *sattva* – clarity. So Viṣṇu enables our minds to be clear and pensive so we can listen carefully and gain knowledge.

Śravaṇa is a star of paying attention and acquiring knowledge. It is an excellent star for education and intelligence, empowering us to ask intelligent questions, listen carefully to answers, and seek qualified teachers.

Viṣṇu is a very transcendental, non-materialistic god. Thus Śravaṇa is particularly well suited to helping humanity acquire *spiritual* knowledge. A famous verse in the Bhāgavata Purāna (7.5.23) explains that the nine processes for obtaining enlightenment all begin with and are rooted in “Viṣṇu Śravaṇa” – hearing from and about Viṣṇu.

Through Śravaṇa Viṣṇu inspires human beings to seek deeper knowledge, spiritual truths, enlightenment and divine love.

Viṣṇu in Ṛg Veda

Viṣṇu is frequently invoked in Ṛg Veda (in 93 different places). He is mainly known there as the younger brother of Indra who reclaimed the universe for Indra in *three steps*.

It is undeniable that Ṛg Veda, being a comparatively materialistic and practical text, focuses primarily on Indra.³¹ But Viṣṇu is uniquely attributed in a few notable instances. For example Ṛg 1.22.20:

tad viṣṇoḥ paramam padam sadā paśyanti sūryaḥ

“The gods always look towards the supreme feet of Viṣṇu.”

³¹ See the chapter on Indra’s star, Jyeṣṭhā, for a more detailed discussion on this point.

Rg (1.154.4) also states, “In truth, Viṣṇu alone maintains the existence of all things.”

Rg (1.156.2) says, “Viṣṇu is the ancient and the recent, the creator of existence and the creator of his own existence.”

Viṣṇu’s Incarnations

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (1.3) gives the following account of Viṣṇu’s incarnations in this world:

At the very beginning, the All-Attractive takes the form called Puruṣa [a synonym for Viṣṇu], to manifest everything required for creation. He produces great conglomerations of primordial energies and enters each, reclines upon the water there, and enters a mystic sleep. A lotus flower grows from the lake of his naval, atop which Brahmā, the master engineer of the universe, is born.

Then Puruṣa enters every minute particle of the universe, becoming the inexhaustible seed of the multitudes of incarnations, fragments of which create gods, animals, humans and so forth.

His most noteworthy incarnations, in summary, are:

1. The **children** [Kumāra] performed the difficult spiritual task of uninterrupted celibacy.
2. The **boar** [Varāha] rescued the earth from the lowest dregs of the universe and lifted her back into her proper place.
3. The **Sage of the Gods** [Nārada] compiled purifying books about how to live in the world without becoming entangled in selfishness.
4. The sages **Nara-Nārāyaṇa** were born from Dharma’s wife. They showed how to perform very serious disciplines of self-control.
5. When empirical sciences were forgotten, the master of perfections, **Kapila**, revived them by teaching Āsuri.

6. Atri's wife Anasūyā once prayed for a divine son. That son [**Dattātreyā**] instructed spiritual knowledge to Alarka, Prahlāda and others.
7. **Yajña**, born from Ākūti and Ruci, took care of the world during the difficult transition out of the Svāyambhu Era.³²
8. **Urukrama**, born from Merudevī and Nābhi, showed the path walked by supremely enlightened souls.
9. As an earthly king [**Prthu**], he answered the prayers of sages by milking the earth to make her body very verdant and attractive.
10. During the global flood of the "Cākṣuṣa" era, he became a **fish** [**Matsya**] and protected the lord of humans by keeping him safe on a boat.
11. In the form of a **tortoise** [**Kurma**] his shell provided the foundation for Mt. Mandara when the gods and demons were churning the ocean.
12. **Dhānvantari** was the twelfth, [who produced the nectar], and...
13. **Mohinī** was an intoxicatingly beautiful woman who gave that nectar to the gods while charming the others with her allure.
14. **Nārasimha** was the man-lion whose claws split open the powerful demon-god, like a carpenter splitting wood.
15. **Vāmana** went to Bali's ritual court and peacefully begged three steps of land, for the sake of reclaiming the three worlds.
16. When kings began to hate moral guidance, **Paraśurāma** protected the earth by annihilating all their militias, twenty one times.

³² The difficulty occurred because there was no one suitable to fill the post of Indra, the king of heaven. So Viṣṇu incarnated as Yajña to personally take the post.

17. **Vyāsa** entered the womb of Satyavatī through Parāśara, to present the many branches of the tree of knowledge in a way which less intellectual commoners could grasp.
18. **Rāma** assumed the role of a human king and, for the sake of the gods, performed many heroic deeds like controlling the ocean.
19. **Bala-Rāma**...
20. ...and **Kṛṣṇa**, were born in the Vṛṣṇi family. The All-Attractive thus removed the earth's burden.
21. When the age of Kali advances, he will bewilder those who dislike the godly. He will be named **Buddha**, the son of Añjanā of Gayā.
22. When the age of Kali draws to a close and almost all the rulers are criminals he will take birth to protect the world with the name **Kalki**, son of Viṣṇu Yaśā.

Viṣṇu is a vast sea of being! Thousands of inexhaustible rivers and lakes come from this sea. Likewise, his incarnations are beyond count. *All* the sages, gods, progenitors, and the original lords of mankind, as well as their extremely powerful descendants, are portions of Viṣṇu.

They are all fragments or expansions of Puruṣa. They all incarnate, age after age, to protect the world whenever the gods' enemies disturb it. But among them all Kṛṣṇa is *unique*, because he is the All-Attractive One himself!

Anyone who carefully recites this list of confidential incarnations of the All-Attractive in a spirit of devotion in the morning and evening gets freed from all misery.

Getting Practical ~ *Dhaniṣṭhā*



Name Dhaniṣṭhā

Meaning Steady sound

Symbol Drum

Deity Vasu – primordial elements

Main Stars α to δ Delphini



Many explain the word *dhaniṣṭhā* as, “wealth (*dhana*) that is steady (*niṣṭha*).” But the more accurate meaning is, “sound (*dhan*) that is steady.”³³ This understanding of the word *dhaniṣṭhā* makes it easy to understand why a drum serves as its symbol.

An alternate name for this star is Śrāviṣṭhā.³⁴ As we learned in the previous chapter, the word *śrav-* has to do with sound and hearing. Śrāviṣṭhā means, “that which is founded on sound and hearing.”

Thus the best way to understand and translate the meaning of Dhaniṣṭhā is *Steady Sound*.

The deities of Dhaniṣṭhā are the Vasu. The word *vasu* means “ray of light,” and, “something of excellence and goodness.” There are eight deities collectively called the Vasu. These deities are the excellent powers of the Supreme Divinity. They are like they rays of light expanding from the Supreme: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Sky / Space, Sun, Moon, and Stars.³⁵

What do these eight elements have to do with “steady sound?”

Many cultures share a concept that creation begins with sound. In the Christian Bible, for example, Genesis (1:3) says, “And God said, ‘Let there be light:’ and there was light.” Or John (1:1), “In the beginning was the Word, it was with God and it was God.”

Vedic culture holds the same essential concept. Sound vibrates in “space”, which is the matrix in which everything exists and which exists within everything. Sound is at the root of every element and every creation. Sound therefore inspires change more effectively than anything else. We all know the power of music, but there are said to be

³³ The root *dhan* means both “wealth” and “sound” – on the principle that those who have opulence become famous, well-known, praised, “heard.”

³⁴ Yet another name: In Brhat-saṁhitā, Varāha Mihira says that Vasu-deva can be used as another name for Dhaniṣṭhā, meaning “the star whose gods are the Vasu.”

³⁵ The exact details of this list vary somewhat from source to source.

more powerful sound-formulae called “mantra” which can call things into being simply by sound.

Since sound is the vibration that catalyzes space to bring forth all the other elements of creation, those elements (the Vasu) are literally *śrāviṣṭhā* or *dhaniṣṭhā* – things that “have their roots and foundation (*niṣṭha*) in sound (*dhan*).”

The Vasu represent the *tangible* unfolding of cosmic power, the potential becoming kinetic. There is an important relationship to note between the former star, Śravaṇa (the star of hearing), and the current star, Śrāviṣṭhā / Dhaniṣṭhā (the star of *acting* – putting into practice what you have heard). Dhaniṣṭhā empowers humanity to put knowledge and theories into practice; and make tangible, practical use of our plans and concepts. Dhaniṣṭhā is therefore a most practical star, favorable for accomplishing deeds and setting plans into motion.

More Practical than Emotional or Romantic

The Mahābhārata tells a fascinating tale involving the Vasu. It begins when they were enjoying a picnic one day in the forest. The wife of the Sky Vasu saw a beautiful cow wandering nearby. To please her, the Sky Vasu took the cow back to their abode when they returned home.

This cow belonged to a powerful sage named Vasiṣṭha. When his cow did not return he used his mystical vision and saw that the Sky Vasu stole it. He laid a curse upon all of the eight Vasu: “Since you act like humans, you will all be born on Earth as humans!”

When they learned of the situation the Vasu rushed to Vasiṣṭha to beg forgiveness. He lightened his curse thus, “Your birth will be extremely short, except for the Sky Vasu. He will have to live a full term.”

The worried Vasu approached the River Ganges and asked her to become their mother and help them. Accepting their plea, she took the form of a beautiful woman and appeared out of the waters of the

Ganges river on earth. A handsome king was doing worship on the shore, so she approached him and sat on his right thigh.

He rebuked her, “Dear lady, only my daughter or daughter-in-law may sit there.”

Ashamed by the king’s moral fortitude in the face of her licentious proposition, the Ganges returned into the water. But later, when that king’s wife had a son, the Ganges again appeared and the son fell in love with her. She agreed to become his wife on one condition, “you must never question *anything* I do.”

She became pregnant seven times. Each time she immediately took the newborn to the Ganges and dropped the child in the water to drown! Thus seven of the eight Vasu were born *very briefly* as human beings, fulfilling the curse of Vasiṣṭha.

When she was carrying the eighth child to the river, her husband could no longer tolerate the pain. He cried out, “O woman, what are you doing!?!?” Thereupon she turned around, placed the child in his arms, and disappeared into the waters.

This eighth child was the Sky Vasu, who had to live an entire human lifetime as Bhīṣma, the “grandfather” in the epic tales of Mahābhārata.

All the problems of the Vasu sprang from a romantic exchange between husband and wife. This explains why Dhaniṣṭhā has a reputation of being unfavorable to marriage. Bhīṣma himself never married or had any romantic relationship with a woman, despite his being the most attractive of princes.³⁶ Dhaniṣṭhā is more concerned with the practical rather than the emotional or romantic.

³⁶ Bhīṣma acted as the “grandfather” of his brothers’ children’s children. He was not literally anyone’s grandfather.

The Underworld ~ *Śatabhiṣaj*



Name Śatabhiṣaj

Meaning Hundreds of healers

Symbol Empty or dark circle

Deity Varuṇa - god of night sky

Main Stars Sadachbia (γ Aquarii)



The name Śatabhiṣaj is made by combining śata + bhiṣaj. Śata means “100” or “a large number.” Bhiṣaj means a “healer” or a “cure.” So I translate it as “Hundreds of Healers” or “Hundreds of Cures.”

Varuṇa is the deity empowering Śatabhiṣaj. In the oldest hymns of the Ṛg Veda, Varuṇa is the god of the night sky while his inseparable companion Mitra is the god of the daytime sky.

The name Varuṇa literally means, “The All-Enveloping Sky.” Śatabhiṣaj’s empty-circle symbol is an image of the sky. Specifically, Varuṇa is the god of the half of the sky that hides (“envelopes”) the Sun. When the Sun falls below the western horizon it enters this enveloping half of the sky. Śatabhiṣaj’s empty circle also represents a “dark sun”.

Since his domain begins where the Sun sets, Varuṇa is connected to sunset and the west. In fact, among the eight deities who guard the directions, Varuṇa is in charge of the west.

Śatabhiṣaj is a star of aeronautics and other atmospheric endeavors. It is the star of western civilization and plays a significant role in the concomitant technological development of humanity.

The Underground

The Ṛg Veda declares that Varuṇa is the chief of the “Asura.” This does not make him a “demon,” it merely indicates that he is a force of darkness. Sura connotes “light” (thus the Sun is called Sura) and Asura connotes “darkness.” Since Varuṇa takes the Sun into darkness, naturally he is an Asura.

But the demonic motif does extend a little further. The enveloping, dark sky is also *dakṣināyaṇa*, the “lower half of the universe.” The lower half of the universe is the “underworld.” Having dominion over the lower universe, Varuṇa also has dominion over the “underworlds.” He is to the underworld what Indra is to the heavens.

Śatabhiṣaj promotes counter-culturalism and underground movements and social groups.

Mysterious Depths

In Vedic cosmology a cosmic ocean is said to exist in the lower half of the universal sphere. Varuṇa’s dominion over the underworld therefore also gives him dominion over water, and he also becomes famous as the god of waters. In Bhagavad Gītā (10.29), Śrī Kṛṣṇa indicates that Varuṇa is the foremost of all beings that dwell in the water: *varuṇo yādasām aham, “Among water-dwellers I am Varuṇa.”*

As we learned in the chapter on Pūrva Aṣāḍhā, Varuṇa is more precisely the *husband* of the waters, and Vāruṇī, his wife, is the actual goddess of water.

Śatabhiṣaj is a nakṣatra with significant mysteriousness and allure, like the deep ocean.

All-Seeing Justice

Since he is the god of the night sky, the stars provide the light by which he sees. The stars are therefore said to be his eyes. There are more stars in Śatabhiṣaj (“hundreds”) than any other nakṣatra. Through these stars Varuṇa watches the hidden affairs of humans and arrests the duplicitous and deceitful in his divine noose.³⁷

Śatabhiṣaj is a star of justice and fair treatment, punishing whomever deserves punishment, without consideration of their status. It is therefore a source of revolutionary movements and liberal forces in human society.

Doctors

Atharva Veda, Taitterīya Saṁhitā, and Taitterīya Brāhmaṇa say: “The god of medicine himself cannot cure someone who falls ill when the Moon is in this nakṣatra.”

³⁷ This noose is yet another signification of Śatabhiṣaj’s empty-circle symbol.

The oldest hymns of Ṛg Veda most probably took formal shape about five thousand years ago when the Winter Solstice occurred with the heliacal rising of Śatabhiṣaj. By definition, the Winter Solstice is the beginning of Capricorn (“Makara”, Varuṇa’s vehicle). This suggests that the symbol for Capricorn may derive from Varuṇa, the god whose star held the Winter Solstice when the symbolism became decided.

Varuṇa and Śatabhiṣāj’s connection to the winter solstice and Capricorn is yet deeper – because the winter solstice marks the end of *dakṣināyaṇa* – the six months the Sun spends moving towards Varuṇa’s “underworld.”

Ancient locations of the other cardinal points in respect to the nakṣatra are also fascinating. In ancient Ṛg Vedic times the Summer Solstice would have occurred near the heliacal rising of the Nāga’s star, Āśleṣā. Varuṇa and the Nāga are close companions, since they rule the underworld together, the Nāga cooperating under Varuṇa’s leadership. The Summer and Winter solstices, which mark the entrance to and exit from the underworld, were guarded by the Nāga in Āśleṣā and Varuṇa in Śatabhiṣaj.

The Vernal and Autumnal Equinoxes, on the other hand, occurred in those ancient times with the heliacal rising of Kṛttikā and Anurādhā, respectively. Anurādhā belongs to Mitra, god of the daytime sky – the inseparable polar opposite of Varuṇa. Kṛttikā belongs to Agñi, the bright god of fire.

The Dark Sun

Although Varuṇa is an Asura, he is one of the children of Aditi – and therefore represents a form of the Sun: the dark sun; the midnight sun – a dark and empty circle.

It may be interesting to note that most of the children of Aditi own nakṣatra. Rg and Yajur Veda name eight Ādityas, the eighth was rejected by his mother, but later redeemed.³⁸

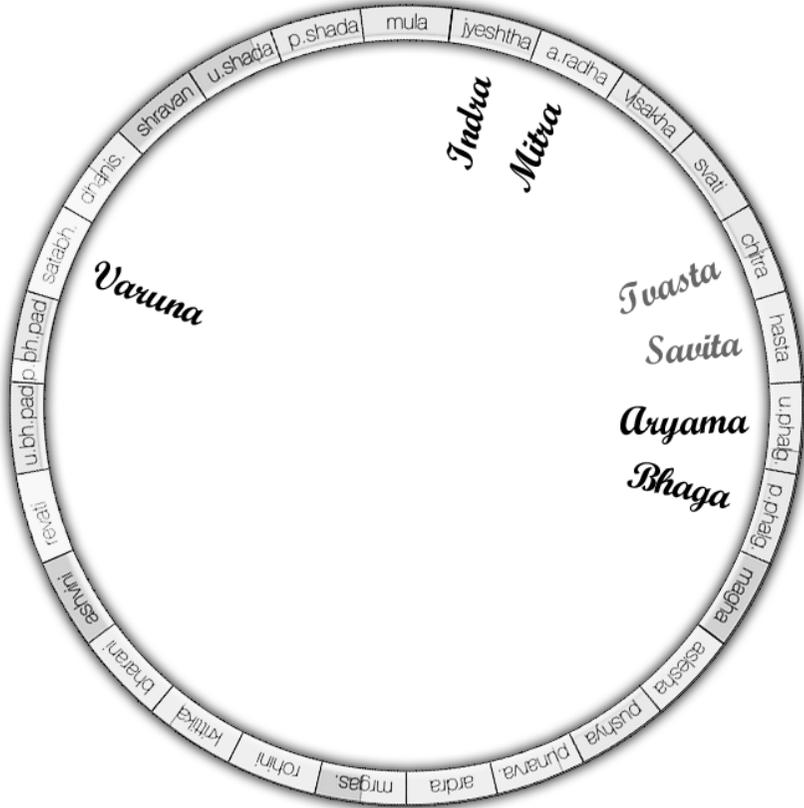
1. Varuṇa deity of Śatabhiṣā
2. Mitra deity of Anurādhā
3. Aryamā deity of Uttara Phālgunī
4. Bhaga deity of Pūrva Phālgunī
5. Amśa
6. Dhatṛ
7. Indra deity of Jyeṣṭhā
8. Mārtanda / Vivasvāna

It is reasonable that the eighth Āditya has no star, since he was rejected by his mother, but what about the fifth and sixth, Amśa and Dhatṛ? In my estimation, Amśa (which means “ray” implying “resplendence”) is equivalent to Savitā, the deity of Hasta; and Dhatṛ is similarly equivalent to Tvaṣṭā, the deity of Citrā.

So the complete list of Ādityas owning stars:

1. Varuṇa deity of Śatabhiṣā
2. Mitra deity of Anurādhā
3. Aryamā deity of Uttara Phālgunī
4. Bhaga deity of Pūrva Phālgunī
5. Amśa / Savitā deity of Hasta
6. Dhatṛ / Tvaṣṭā deity of Citrā
7. Indra deity of Jyeṣṭhā
8. Mārtanda / Vivasvāna

³⁸ A later commentary on **Yajur Veda (Satapatha Brahmana)** expanded the number of Ādityas to 12. This list is again slightly different from the classical list of 12 Ādityas found in the Puranas.



Destruction ~ *Pūrva Bhādrapadā*



- Name** Pūrva Bhādrapadā
Meaning Blessed steps (I)
Symbol Hearse
Deity Ajaikapāt - fire-dragon
Main Stars Markab and Scheat (α and β Pegasi)



This is the first of a pair of stars named *Bhādrapadā*, which means a “blessed step.”

The shared symbol of the two *Bhādrapadā* is a *hearse*: a vehicle that carries a dead body to its final destination. How odd for a hearse to symbolize “*blessed steps!*” Reflecting on this, we should realize that the “steps” of the *Bhādrapadā* stars refer to the path on which we journey from this life to the next.

Alternative symbols for *Pūrva Bhādrapadā*:

- Swords, symbolizing the cutting of ties and attachments to our former life.
- A man with two faces, symbolizing a soul looking in two directions: backwards towards the former life, and forwards towards the next.

Pūrva Bhādrapadā is a serious star concerned with significant personal transformation.

Two Dragons

Another similarity between the two *Bhādrapadā* stars is their deity; both of whom are dragons of destruction.³⁹ The first star in the pair, *Pūrva Bhādrapadā*, belongs to the *fire* dragon *Ajaikapāt*. The second, *Uttara Bhādrapadā*, belongs to the *water* dragon *Ahirbudhnya*. When *Ajaikapāt* is mentioned in the Veda, he is almost always mentioned along with *Ahirbudhnya*. The later tales of the *Purāṇa*⁴⁰ treat the two as brothers, describing them both as sons of *Viśvakarmā*.

“*Ajaikapāt*” – The Supernatural Serpent

It is not easy to conclusively translate the word *ajaikapāt*. It is a compound with three parts: *aja+eka+pada*.

³⁹ The deities of both stars are *Nāga* (dragons) and *Rudra* (destructive deities).

⁴⁰ For example: *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1.15).

- *Aja* means *supernatural* - without normal birth.
- *Eka* means *one*.
- *Pada* means *foot, trail, path*.

There are many ways to meaningfully combine these three concepts. The most straightforward way I can think of is, “Supernatural Serpent.” A serpent is *ekapad* because it leaves a single trail as its footprint. A *supernatural* serpent is a Nāga, or “dragon.”

The Nāga reign in the very wealthy underworld and have control over precious metals and gems. Mahābhārata (Udyoga 114.4) therefore describes Ajaikapāt as a lord of the Earth’s gold.

Through Pūrva Bhādrapadā, Ajaikapāt empowers humans to acquire and accumulate wealth.

Another important way to translate *ajaiikapāt* is as the “single path to transcendence.” This resonates loud and clear with Pūrva Bhādrapadā’s symbols, such as the hearse – which takes a person on the blessed trail between one life and the next.

By inclining human beings towards the path to the hereafter, Pūrva Bhādrapadā makes us more critical and pessimistic towards what is in the here and now.

There are at least two other notable ways to translate *ajaiikapāt*, both of which have to do with storms and both of which take the *aja* component with an alternate meaning of *one who goes wherever he likes*. Because of this meaning, *aja* can refer to mountain-goats and the drivers of vehicles.

- “*One-footed goat*.” This is a poetic term for lightning, since lightning goes anywhere it likes (like a goat amongst the high mountains) without ordinary legs.

- “One-legged driver.” This is a poetic reference to storms, whose driving winds move through the sky without conventional legs

The Veda describes Ajaikapāt as a deity accompanied by floods, storms, and lightning. Taittiriya Brahmana (3.1.2) describes Ajaikapāt as a form or companion of the fiery Sun. The heat of the fiery sun evaporates the waters of the ocean, which then creates storms, lightning, rain and floods. Indeed, in Rg Veda (10.65.13), Ajaikapāt is described as the atmosphere and clouds, which “hold up the sky.”

Storms are destructive forces controlled by the howling gods of destruction. Thus, the later Purāṇic tales⁴¹ classify him (and his brother Ahirbudhnya) as one of the eleven destructive gods called Rudra.

The destructive force of Ajaikapāt is not to be overlooked when considering the nature of his star, Pūrva Bhādrapadā. After all, a hearse carries a corpse to its final destruction, usually (at least in Vedic times) to be cremated in fire.

Although dangerous and destructive, storms are an important part of nature’s cycle. They enable the ecosystem to thrive and replenish itself.

Reincarnation (renewal through death) is therefore a theme of the two Bhādrapadā stars. The first, Pūrva Bhādrapadā suggests the “front” of the hearse: the beginning of the process of reincarnation: the attempt to cut off attachments to the life one must leave behind.

⁴¹ For example: Mahābhārata (Adi 66.2) and Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (6.6.17-18)

The Depths ~ *Uttara Bhādrapadā*



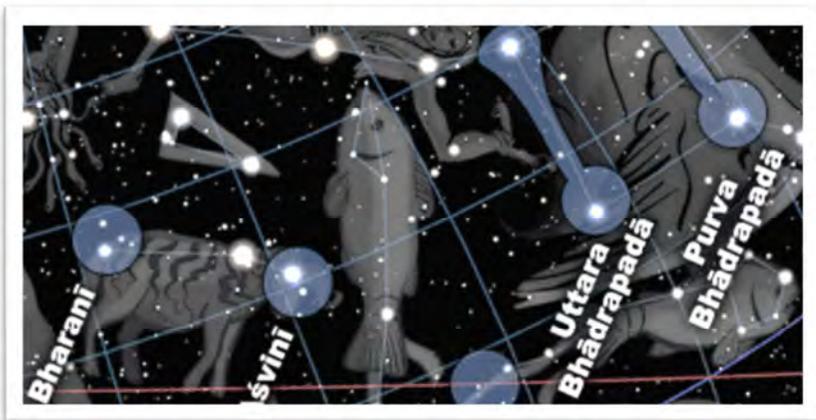
Name Uttara Bhādrapadā

Meaning Blessed steps (II)

Symbol Hearse

Deity Ahirbudhnya - water-dragon

Main Stars Algenib (γ Pegasi) & Alpheratz (α Andromedae)



Uttara Bhādrapadā is the second in the Bhādrapadā pair. Like the first, it is about “auspicious steps” - the path from this life to the next. Like the first, it deals with the theme of reincarnation and transformation, but where the previous Bhādrapadā approaches the theme in a difficult manner (the *early* steps on the “auspicious path”, wherein we must accept destruction and let go of our previous identities) the second star in the pair, Uttara Bhādrapadā, has a more pleasant angle because it represents the *later* steps on the “auspicious path”, during which we have already made peace with the loss and destruction of our old situation and are ready to embrace the transformation to our new state.

Both Bhādrapadās are ruled by gods of destruction (Rudras) in the form of dragons (Nāgas). The dragon of Pūrva Bhādrapadā is surrounded by fire, a painful element. The dragon of Uttara Bhādrapadā, on the other hand, is surrounded by water, a soothing element.

Uttara Bhādrapadā, like its twin, inclines human beings towards a transcendent and transformational path, but with more calm and less scorn compared to its predecessor.

Being the star of a dragon, Uttara Bhādrapadā does incline humanity towards wealth. But the decidedly transformational or even “spiritual” nature of Uttara Bhādrapadā allows us to conceive of wealth as something more than just a financial entity. Much more than its predecessor, Uttara Bhādrapadā imparts generosity with wealth and an optimistic vision for the future.

Dragon of the Deep

The name Ahirbudhnya is a compound of two roots, *ahi+budhnya*.

- *Ahi* refers to the sky⁴²
- *Budhnya* means *bound to the root*.

⁴² It is also sometimes used as an abbreviated address for Ahirbudhnya. English-Sanskrit dictionaries thus also translate it as “serpent,” etc.

In this case the “sky” refers to the entire cosmos. At the root of this cosmic sky is a powerful Nāga who holds the entire thing in place: Ahirbudhnya. In later tales Ahirbudhnya is more commonly referred to as Ananta Śeṣa, about whom we first learned in the chapter on Āśleṣā. I recommend rereading that chapter’s section on Ananta Śeṣa, particularly paying attention to the spiritual themes this divinity brings to Uttara Bhādrapadā.

Since the lower half of the cosmos is thought to contain a type of cosmic “ocean”, and since Ahirbudhnya is at the very root of the cosmos, he dwells at the bottom of this ocean. Thus we can refer to him as “the dragon of the deep.”

Uttara Bhādrapadā imparts a love for water, and all the classical qualities of the Water element: fertility, beauty, quietude, calm, introspection, and even a loneliness or sense of being separate and private from the world.

Ahirbudhnya is an auspicious dragon, but a dragon nonetheless. So...

Anger, aggression and envy sometimes manifest through Uttara Bhādrapadā, but the watery environs and spiritual temperament of Ahirbudhnya tends to make such things short lived and manageable.

Abundance ~ *Revatī*



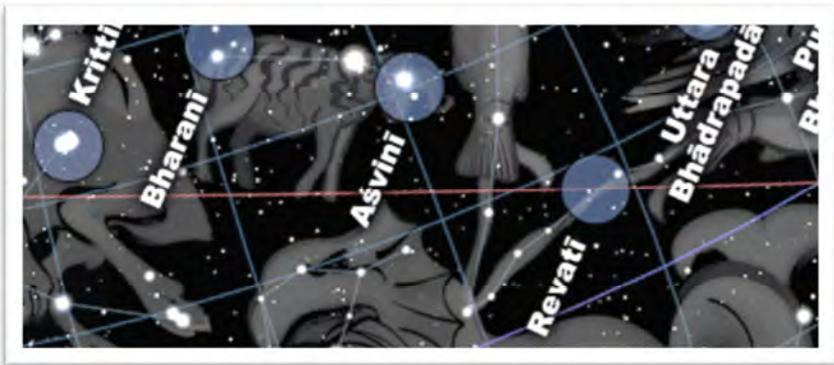
Name Revatī

Meaning Generous prosperity

Symbol Drum

Deity Pūṣan - god of protection

Main Stars ζ Piscium



The word *revatī*, a form of the root *rd*, means: “She who increases prosperity, success, fortune, wealth, and abundance.” Revatī is also the name of Śrī Balarāma’s wife. Balarāma is an avatāra of Viṣṇu who plays the role of Kṛṣṇa’s elder brother.

Pūṣan is the deity of this nakṣatra. A synonym of *revatī*, the word *pūṣan* means: “One who nourishes, bringing growth and abundance.”⁴³

Pūṣan is one of the most important Vedic gods, whose role became much less significant as Indian religion moved away from ritual materialism towards philosophy and spirituality.

Prosperous

Pūṣan tends domestic animals, the agrarian equivalent of money. Rg (6.55.2) therefore describes Pūṣan as being fantastically *wealthy*. Rg (6.55.4) describes him driving herds of goats. Rg (6.53.9) describes him herding cows who produce bliss and prosperity. Rg (6.54.5) describes him protecting domestic animals like cows and horses.

Revatī inspires human beings to attain prosperity and wealth.

Gentle & Loving

Protection of animals inspires gentility and compassion. Not surprisingly, then, Rg (6.56.1-2) says that Pūṣan enjoys vegetarian foods as much as Indra enjoys drinking soma. He is especially fond of a milk-curd and rice-meal mixture. From his vegetarian preference, we can understand that he is a gentle and kind deity. Indeed he is described as having “no teeth” (no “bite.”).

Rg (6.57.5) describes Pūṣan as being “generous with affection.”

⁴³ It is easy to mix the deity “Pūṣan” with the star “Puṣya.” There is an etymological link, and a similarity between the stars Revatī and Puṣya, but remember that Bṛhaspati is the deity of Puṣya, and Pūṣan is the deity of Revatī.

Revatī inspires love, kindness, gentility and non-violence. It is therefore a prosperous influence on marriage and other loving relationships.

Regarding how Pūṣan lost his teeth: According to Taittiriya Samhita, Pūṣan was in attendance at a ceremonial sacrifice to which Rudra was uninvited. Insulted, Rudra shot an arrow into the sacrificial offering just as Pūṣan was biting down on it.

Bhāgavata Purāna (4.5) gives different details. It says the person holding the ceremony was Dakṣa, the father of Śiva’s wife, a woman who had just committed suicide in contempt for her father’s harsh insults of her husband. Śiva and his forces stormed the sacrifice, destroying everything. They cut off Dakṣa’s head and also punished other people who were implicated in the insults towards Śiva. Pūṣan’s teeth were kicked out because he showed a sympathetic smile while Dakṣa insulted Śiva.

Thus Rudra’s Ārdrā and Pūṣan’s Revatī are incompatible and quite different in nature.

Generous

In Rg (6.53), the second verse describes Pusan’s blessings as “liberal and free-handed.” The third says that Pūṣan makes even the stingy become generous, and even the hard-hearted become compassionate. The fifth through eighth verses say that Pūṣan’s (an agrarian tool that can double as a spear or knife) destroys the hearts of those who are greedy and avaricious, and inclines even them to devotion and love.

Revatī inspires generosity, compassion and devotion.

A Guide

Pūṣan protects animals and humans from getting lost and falling to harm. In Rg (6.54) the first and second verses say that he sends guides to point out our objectives and show us the surest and straightest paths to them.

The tenth verse says that Pūṣan blesses us to find whatever we have lost.

Revatī inspires skill in finding lost items, and finding our way without becoming lost. It also inspires humanity to find trustworthy practical, moral, and spiritual guides, “gurus.”

Pūṣan is also sometimes addressed in a role similar to the Pitṛ: helping the deceased soul find its way to the next destination.

Pūṣan and Viṣṇu

Like Viṣṇu, Pūṣan is on occasion referred to as Indra’s supporter and brother. Pūṣan’s qualities of gentility, devotion, guidance and goodness are very consistent with the qualities possessed by Viṣṇu. Some conjecture that Pūṣan may be an early or alternate vision of Viṣṇu; or, put another way, that the later conception of Viṣṇu incorporated the earlier conception of Pūṣan. The similarity between the two, and the association of the Viṣṇu-avatāra Balarāma with goddess Revatī, sometimes generates a misconception that Viṣṇu is the deity of Revatī. The Vedāṅga Jyotiṣa, however, is explicit: Viṣṇu is the god of Śravaṇa, and Pūṣan the god of Revatī.

Nonetheless, due to the similarity of character in Pūṣan and Viṣṇu, Revatī has an effect very similar to the effect she would have if Viṣṇu were her deity.

The Drum

There is also a link between Dhaniṣṭhā and Revatī, since they both share the same symbol: a drum. Both nakṣatra allow fortune to manifest – providing the background “beat matrix” upon which the “melodious decorations of life” can exist.

Revatī indicates fortune, and a good sense of rhythm.

Interpretive Implications of the 27 Stars

Now I will summarize the most important interpretive implications of each of the 27 Vedic stars. After the Sanskrit name of each star, I will give a catchphrase-cum-translation that I feel encapsulates the nature of the star. Then I will give a list of several key words that are extremely relevant to the star. Finally I will give a paragraph explaining many of those keywords in a little more detail.

Aśvinī ~ *The Beautiful Stallion*

Health, medicine, beauty, enjoyment, swiftness, loyalty

Aśvinī is the star of health, beauty, and speed. It inspires the science of medicine: surgery and curing of illness (especially blindness). It increases our appetite for enjoyment but also our appreciation of loyalty and good character.

Bharaṇī ~ *Labor Pains*

Self-sacrifice, labor, effort, child-bearing

Bharaṇī represents difficulties on the path to prosperity. It is the “pain” that leads to “gain.” It empowers humanity with self-control and sobriety so that we can endure trials for the sake of producing something truly great.

Kṛttikā ~ *The Sharp Blade*

Incision, insight, brilliance, subdivision, critique, sharpness

Kṛttikā is “bright” – brilliant, intellectual, and quick to digest .It is a star of insight, incisiveness, and dissection. It is analytical and critical and therefore not favorable towards things requiring tender care.

Rohiṇī ~ *The Blushing Bride*

Creativity, fertility, passion, beauty, inspiration, imagination

Rohiṇī is the star of fertility & creativity; two traits always accompanied by passion and beauty. It is a star of motivation and all manner of creative talents. It abounds in imagination & procreation. It has a short-lived but hot temper when frustrated.

Mṛgaśīrṣā ~ *The Quest*

The search for goals and paths; quests

Mṛgaśīrṣā is a star of searching for the best goal, and the best path to it. It empowers humanity to seek and quest, driving the human animal to sniff out the paths of life in search of true happiness.

Ārdrā ~ *The Storm*

Storms, destruction, frustration, blockade, spirituality

Ārdrā is the storm that we must weather so that our nature can once again become pure and clean. It represents all the things we must overcome before we can prosper. It allows us to destroy inauspicious things and forget what should be forgotten. Given spiritual direction, Ārdrā empowers us to destroy the false ego and enter blessed realms.

Punarvasu ~ *Repeating Patterns*

Repetition, pattern, cause within effect; good offspring; unity, wholeness

Punarvasu is about things happening again; Things happening within other things, within themselves; in cycles; in repetition. It is a star of good offspring and non-linear cognition. It empowers humanity to work cooperatively, become unified, seek holistic and all-embracing understandings, and to embrace a principle of all-inclusive divine love.

Puṣya ~ *The Highest Blossom*

Devotion, growth, flourishing, prosperity, morality, prayer, meditation

Puṣya enables us to commune with deeper principles. This strengthens morality and causes prosperity and victory. It encourages faith, and ultimately leads to selfless devotional intimacy with the divine.

Āśleṣā ~ *Serpentine Embrace*

Luxury, pleasures, embraces, clinging, loyalty, jealousy, cunning

Āśleṣā empowers us embrace strongly, with deep and enduring emotion and desire. It inspires us to bear great responsibilities for the sake of those we love. It endows us with charisma, charms and mystique. It has a weakness towards deception and jealousy, but strength towards deep mysticism and true spirituality.

Maghā ~ Inherited Power

Power, gifts, wealth, DNA, inherited traits, ancestors, past lives, afterlife, justice

Maghā bestows gifts “from our ancestors.” This literally indicates inheritance of power, career, fortune, and qualities (“DNA”). Such inheritance really comes as a result of efforts made in our previous births, so Maghā also indicates powers, qualities and abilities carried over from past lives.

Pūrva Phālgunī ~ Romantic Enjoyment

Romance, love, enjoyment, expertise, romantic divinity

Pūrva Phālgunī grants expertise and beauty, helping us enjoy a fulfilling and satisfying sensual and romantic life. It especially dissolves the distinction between material and spiritual, uniting the two through divine love.

Uttara Phālgunī ~ Vows of Friendship

Friendship, matchmaking, agreements, vows

Uttara Phālgunī grants successful and enjoyable romance and love. It produces matchmakers and expert councilors in the arts of love and romance. It allows for successful resolution of arguments, and finding agreements, friendship and harmony.

Hasta ~ Dexterity

Dexterity, manipulation, hands; awareness, awakening, sunrise

Hasta grants heightened awareness and dexterity, empowering us to manipulate tools and be physically agile. It makes us more observant and difficult to deceive and more capable of deceiving others.

Citrā ~ *Multifaceted Brilliance*

Intellect, ingenuity, creativity; technology, detail

Citrā empowers humanity to comprehend multi-faceted designs, lay complex blueprints, and generate masterpieces and technological marvels. It is the star of architects, designers and engineers; and allows us to comprehend and give shape to many angles of a subject.

Svāti ~ *Individuality*

Individuality, distinction, maverick, separatism

Svāti empowers us to be individuals capable of standing on our own and going against the norm if need be. It helps us clearly and confidently define “I” and individualize ourselves. It can inspire equally to self-realization or self-absorption.

Viśākhā ~ *Obsession*

Decisive, dedicated, fixated, goal-oriented, undistracted

Viśākhā grants the ability to stay on course and to focus sharply on attaining goals. It creates strong dedication to clear objectives and fosters the ability to achieve those goals by any means necessary.

Anurādhā ~ *Devotion*

Devotion, friendship, love as law, faithfulness

Anurādhā grants deep devotion to friends and lovers. It makes our motivations more loving and selfless. It grants the ability to achieve objectives through good “people skills,” likeability and trustworthy dedication.

Jyeṣṭhā ~ Eminence

Eminent, jealous of rivals, protected by destiny, desirous

Jyeṣṭhā empowers humans to become better than their peers, yet inclines us to be jealous of rivals. It grants us the ability to protect ourselves and ensure our victories, often by supernatural means. It inclines us to enjoy our power and eminence.

Mūla ~ Uprooting

Roots, origins, lawlessness, destruction, spirituality

Mūla inspires humanity away from what is normal and accepted, towards what is hidden, deeper, more original and true. It is a star of lies and hidden things; and has the power to destroy them both to reveal the deepest truths. Mūla empowers destruction and allows us to destroy all that is superficial and illusory on our quest for true origins, true roots.

Pūrva Aṣāḍhā ~ The Invincible

Power, victory, appeal, popularity, strength, fertility, purity

Pūrva Aṣāḍhā is a star of strength through purity. It confers strength and power to mankind, but in a pleasant manner, like the invincible yet appealing power of water. Being both appealing and powerful, Pūrva Aṣāḍhā creates leaders with significant popularity and mass appeal.

Uttara Aṣāḍhā ~ Complete Victory

Unchallengeable, undefeatable, intense and all-consuming

Uttara Aṣāḍhā empowers human beings to give “110%” to their tasks, drawing all available power and pouring it into each of their endeavors. It is a star that helps create people who are undefeatable, even unchallengeable in their determination, strength, and intensity; and who can pull together many divergent resources and make them work for a common purpose.

Śravaṇa ~ *Listening Carefully*

Sound, listening, learning

Śravaṇa is an excellent star for intelligence and education. Through it we become good listeners, speakers, and audio-smiths. Śravaṇa inspires us to learn, ask intelligent questions, listen carefully to answers, and seek qualified teachers. It is one of the few stars that pleasantly turns us towards spiritual enlightenment.

Dhaniṣṭhā ~ *Getting Practical*

Practicality, ideas given shape, plans set in motion, substance given form

Dhaniṣṭhā is a practical star, setting theories into practice and seeking tangible returns on ideas. It is too practical for things that require a lot of romance, sympathy, empathy and emotion.

Śatabhiṣaj ~ *The Underworld*

The sky, west, underground, night, depths, equality, medicine

Śatabhiṣaj is the star of aeronautics, technology and western civilization. It is a profound and mysterious star promoting counter-culturalism and underground movements. It seeks liberal equality, and fair administration of justice, and is thus often a cause of revolutionary tendencies. It is also a star with special relevance to health and medicine.

Pūrva Bhādrapadā ~ Destruction

Transformation, death and the afterlife, (the need for) detachment, hoarding / holding on, pessimism, destruction, storms

Pūrva Bhādrapadā is a serious star concerned with significant personal transformation. Inclining us towards personal transformation, it makes us more critical, pessimistic and destructive towards the here and now, and the wealth we are simultaneously inclined to accumulate in it.

Uttara Bhādrapadā ~ Depth

Transformation, afterlife, various types of wealth, generosity, optimism, depth, intuition, emancipation

Uttara Bhādrapadā enables us to open our arms to transformation with an optimistic view of what we will become. It creates a love for water and imparts the traits of water, fertility, beauty, quietude, calm, introspection, depth and even a loneliness or sense of being separate and private from the world. Anger, aggression and envy are intense but short lived and manageable.

Revatī ~ Abundance

Prosperity, love, gentility, generosity, guidance, spirituality

Revatī inspires human beings to attain true prosperity and wealth; through generosity, compassion, devotion and kindness. It blesses loving relationships, inclines us to non-violence, and helps us find our way forward without getting lost. It also grants a good sense of timing and rhythm.

The 28th Star ~ *Abhijit*



There is a “28th star,” Abhijit, which seems to be omitted from most considerations of Vedic Stars. There are various explanations offered for why it gets left out. Some say it fell out of favor when the Indians began embracing the 12 signs and wanted to create a symmetrical integration between their pre-existing star-groups and the newly adopted signs (27 and 12 are mathematically compatible. 28 and 12 are not). I personally think the best explanation becomes evident when we look at what Abhijit really is: Vega, which is at some points in history the actual North Star. Abhijit is so far north of the ecliptic that the Moon never remotely enters its vicinity. So I think it is *rightfully* left out of the vast majority of astrological considerations.

Use of the Stars

Certainly a reasonably experienced and educated astrologer can simply look at what planets occupy which stars in an individual birth chart, and by combining the symbolism of the planet with the symbolism of the star you can gain volumes of useful interpretive information. Include the ascendant. The Moon begs to be considered the most important of the planets in this regard, but that is probably only because the Moon's star is often also the star association with the day the chart's owner was born.

That point leads us to other equally, if not more important ways to use the stars. Look outside the conventional modern birthchart and into the details found in the "Kāla Jataka." There, inquire into the nakṣatra of:

- The birthday (and the "emptied" nakṣatras thereof)
- The birth month
- The full moon of that birth month
- The muhūrta
- The nadi
- Jupiter's year

And learn to use the other information associated with nakṣatras, found in the kāla jataka, such as waxing / waning, lunar phase, lunar day, yogas, etc.

Acknowledgements

Cāndogya Upaniṣad 6.14.2 says:

आचार्यवान्पुरुषो वेद

ācāryavān puruṣo veda

“One who has an Ācārya [guru] personifies the Vedas.”

Commenting on this, A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī says, “One who is in association with great ācāryas, even if he is not educated or has never studied the Vedas, can become familiar with all the knowledge necessary for realization.”

My Ācāryadeva is Śrī Śrīmad Dhanurdhara Swāmī. He introduced me to astrology in 1992 and sparked my interest in it. Although he is not an astrologer himself, he is a true Ācārya and therefore I was able to gain whatever astrological knowledge and expertise I have as a result of his divine blessings, without the need for any formal “astrological guru.”

If he is pleased with this book, feeling that it is of benefit to humanity and that it glorifies the divine, then my effort is a success. Other yardsticks of success are inconsequential.

I am also pleased to acknowledge the kind help of another agency of Śrī Guru, Dr. Satyanārāyana dās Bābājī, who is among the foremost scholars of Sanskrit and Vedic literature. He very kindly agreed to check the Sanskrit in this book, and review and comment on the manuscript. His corrections and suggestions were of paramount importance to making this a truly authorized and substantial book.

I am also deeply indebted to Neal Stephens. I took up the task of writing this book partially due to his eagerness to study the Vedic Nakṣatra. His voluntary, selfless service of editing and proofreading was extremely helpful.

In my every endeavor I am always happily indebted to

My loving wife,
Śyāma Sakhi,

And our dear children:

Bhanu,
Damien,
Lunetta and
Lalitā.

कराग्रेवसतेलक्ष्मिः करमध्येसरस्वति ।
करमूलेतुगोविन्दः प्रभातेकरदर्शनम् ॥

It appears that a man named Vic DiCara wrote this book. However, the Goddess Lakṣmī actually wrote it, empowering his fingers to strike the keys. But the truth is that Goddess Sarasvati truly wrote the book, having the knowledge and learning that allowed the typing fingers to move. Yet, the final reality at the root of it all is that Govinda himself wrote the book – to reveal himself to you more clearly.

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