

PRAŚNA AND ITS TIME DIVISIONS : AN OBSERVATION

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This article is an attempt to introduce the larger value and applicability of Praśna, one of the six divisions of Indian/Vedic astrology. Writings in English on Indian/Vedic astrology have undermined the potential of Praśna in reading the life of a man or his/her family in the present day life. This sidelining has been made by reducing Praśna as mere 'horary astrology'. By that they mean a local practice that is made to answer a particular question and not meant to understand the life as a whole. I would like to argue that, this reduction of Praśna as a 'horary astrology' was a misconception. Praśna has wider meaning and wider applications.

Praśna, as mentioned above, is one among the six divisions of astrology namely, jśtaka, gola, nimitta, muhūrta and gaṇita. It is widely used for everyday purpose in Kerala. The word praśna means 'asking question'. But if you are closely looking into the root of the word and its meaning we will know that, praśna has wider meaning and implications. It means something which inspires an astrologer to reveal the cause and remedies (of a situation/a life or whatever). Praśna involves not merely predicting the life of an individual in a given time, but also the whole life condition of a family, a lineage and beyond. Example for it is the practice of aṣṭamangala praśna. Here Praśna does its calculation on the basis of multiple divisions of time. The practice existing in Kerala and the texts available from there as well prove that the concept of time is well developed in Praśna.

Praśnamārga is an exhaustive treatise discussing various aspects of praśna. This text has been considered exceptional, interesting and valuable. While compiling it, the author had culled out information from a number of ancient texts like Brihajjātaka, Kṛṣṇīya, Praśnānuṣṭhānapaddhati. The Jātaka, yet another branch of jyotiṣa which stands close to praśna, deals with predictions made on the basis of the rising sign (Lagna) at the time of a person's birth. Praśna, on the other hand, refers to the time of raising the question, or a prediction made by referring to the auspicious moment a person asking a remedy to solve a problem.

However, there are many similarities between Praśna and Jātaka. The Praśnamārga says that, the Praśna chart should be read just as the horoscope to examine relative merits and demerits. A person consults an astrologer when he/she gets prompted by the divine being to know his/her future. As praśnalagna is similar to Janmalagna, all events should be read from Praśna, as do in a horoscope. The time of asking question (Praśnalagna) should be given the same importance as a time of birth. Human births are regulated according to the law of Karma and hence the time of birth is significant. Similarly a person proceeds to an astrologer to ascertain his future prompted by a Divine force and hence the time of question (meeting between the person and the astrologer) is equally important. Of course, there are certain points of difference in reading praśna chart and horoscope. Details of it are well discussed in Praśnamārga. But unless otherwise implied, all events revealed in a horoscope can also be read from a praśna-chart.

Praśnamārga further says that, a man is born in this world to enjoy or suffer the consequence of his deeds from his past birth. A portion of this he reaps in heaven or hell, but for the remnant he has to take a new birth. There are two kinds of Karma, viz., sañcita and prārabdha. The effects of sañcita will be cleared in heaven or hell. The prārabdhakarma will be lessened while living in this world and meeting with different kinds of experiences. Prārabdhakarma, at the end of this life, will result in our re-birth. Souls take fresh births for reaping the fruits of previous lives. This cycle

of births and deaths will be going on till one attains jñana or mokṣa (true knowledge). Karma has its philosophical as well as astrological aspects. Therefore, it is practically difficult to make a detailed discussion on it in a short article like this.

The balance of good or bad Karma brought forward from the previous birth is prārabdha, and it is the reading of this aspect that goes under the name of Jataka. That is, one undergoes the consequences of one's previous Karma from birth to death and this can be known from his horoscope. Just as a lamp illumines objects in darkness, jyotiṣa (jātaka) reveals to us the effects of our previous Karma, whether it is good or bad. All the grahas indicate clearly whether we are enjoying or suffering in the present as a result of our actions in our previous birth. Jyotiṣa merely indicates the results of past Karma. Grahas are only an index of things to happen and they do not cause the events. This definition must enable us to appreciate the real significance and scope of jyotiṣa and its relation to the theory of Karma. It is also suggested that accumulated Karma during the past birth may be experienced not only by the person concerned but also by his descendants.

Praśna reveals to us whether a man reaps the fruits of his deeds in his previous birth or the fruits of his action in this birth. But, with the help of praśna we can distinguish whether it is the results of our previous Karma or present Karma. If the horoscope has a beneficial planetary pattern and the praśna-chart disadvantageous ones, then it is to be understood that the native is experiencing the fruits of evil Karma done in this birth. If vice versa, then also the native is experiencing the effects of good Karma done in this birth. If the planetary patterns in the horoscope as well as in the praśna-chart are similar, then a blessed astrologer would reveal that the native is experiencing the fruits of his past Karma only. Praśnamārga explains the relative utilities of the praśna and the birth-chart (horoscope). There is repeated emphasis on the influences of Karma and the importance of praśna in finding out the nature of Karma to be enjoyed in this birth. The birth chart by itself reveals the nature of past Karma and the praśna-chart acts as some sort of a supplement to the birth-chart. Suppose we see in a

man's birth-chart a good period and in his praśna-chart a very bad time, then we have to assume that the person is reaping the bad effects of his karma done in this life. Suppose we see in his horoscope (birth-chart) a bad period and in his praśna-chart a good period, it is to be inferred that the person is reaping the favorable effects of good deeds done in this birth only. If the horoscope and praśna are similar in positions and combinations, then the person is reaping the results of Karma done in his previous birth. Since some sort of a balancing is found in the birth and praśna-chart, it is clear that the current indications in the birth-chart, (whether it is on the benefic and malefic dispositions of current Daśa lords ,Yogakāraka) have to be studied along with the praśna-chart to know the nature of Karma now being experienced. Therefore, for better understanding of the condition of the native, a blessed astrologer should read the praśna-chart along with examining the birth-chart (horoscope) to know the relative merits and demerits.

There are astrologers who claim higher status for prasna by arguing that they proceed with astrological calculation considering 108 ārūdhās. But this claim needs to be verified. First I will introduce the definition of ārūdhā that appears in praśnamārga. It says that, ārūdhā is the sign that mounts up when the questioner puts the query. A proper examination of the ārūdhā leads to a clear assessment of the chart concerned. If the above said is the first way to know the ārūdhā, there is a second way to find it, as well. It is achieved by putting a gold coin on one of the 12 divisions of the rāśīcakra drawn by the astrologer using vibhūti (divine ash) and by offering worship at the rāśīcakra conceiving Dakṣiṇāmūrthy (Lord Śiva) in its middle.

If we want to broaden the concept of ārūdhā, we could say that there are twenty four ārūdhās, but all of them are extensions of the two ārūdhās we have already seen. These are ārūdhās, or the signs, that enables one to know different subjects concerning the person who is asking the question, like his/her employment, marriage, etc. Praśnamārga gives names to all these twenty four ārūdhās. Among these 24 ārūdhās, eleven

are related to the day on which the native is approaching the astrologer to perform a praśna or inviting to perform a praśna. They are 1. Ārūdha 2. Udayalagna 3. Iagnāmsā 4. Chatrarāśi 5. Sprushtangarāśi 6. Chandrarāśi 7. Chandranavāmsā. 8. Prasthānalagna 9. Akṣarārūdha 10. Daivajñabhāva 11. Dūtabhāva . The remaining 13 ārūdhas are arrived on the day on which the gold coin (paṇam) has been put on the rāśicakra. They are 1. Swarṇārūdha 2. Swarṇāmsāka 3. Udayalagna 4. Udayalagnāmsā 5. Chandrarāśi 6. Chandrāmsāka 7. Chatrarāśi 8. Spruṣṭāngarāśi 9. Arkayuktarsham 10. Tambūlarāśi 11. Trisphutarāśi 12. Sūkṣmatrisphutarāśi. 13. Swarṇādūtabhāva. Thus altogether there are 24 ārūdhas.

Praśna can be answered elaborately or not much elaborately. To do so praśna subscribes to many indices. They are 1. Tithi (lunar day) 2. Star of the day 3. Vāra 4. Prabhruta 5. Ahna 6. Bālannavarjyatarā 7. Gandānta 8. Uṣṇa 9. Viṣaghatikā 10. Aṣṭami 11. Viṣṭi 12. Riktha. 13. Sthirakarāṇa 14. Tithisandhi 15. Nakṣatrasandhi 16. Rāśisandhi 17. Amśakasandhi. 18. Gulikodaya 19. Lāta 20. Vidhrutam 21. Grahaṇam 22. Sārpamastaka 23. Ekārgalaa 24. Mrutyuyoga 25. Dagdhayoga. 26. Aśubhayoga 27. Pāpadrṣṭi 28. Pāpodaya 29. Trayodaśī 30. Pradoṣa 31. Niseedham 32. Ravidarśanam 33. Samkrānti 34. Vipādati nakṣatram 35. Aṣṭamarāśi 36. Janmāṣṭama 37. Amrutaghati 38. Śubhodaya 39. Śubhadrṣṭi 40. Muhūrta 41. Sidhāmrutayoga 42. Nādīphalam 43. Kālahora 44. Bhūtodaya 45. Grahodaya 46. Deśam 47. Swavāyu 48. Daivajñadāsa 49. Prastursparśana 50. Haritt. 51,52, 53, 54,55. Dūtavākyam. 56. Shtiti 57. Cheṣṭā 59. Bhāva 60. Vilokana 61. Vāsanā 62. Talkālam. 63. Nirgama 64. Mārga 65. Mandiragati 66. Prathamānīti 67. Cakralekhanam. 68. Dīpam 69. Swarṇam 70. Pañcamahasūtram. 71. Aṣṭamangalam 72. Grahachāram 73. Jātakam 74. Devānukūlyam 75. Bādāhā 76. Ābhichāram 77. Nimittas. But, none of the praśna texts say that these 77 indices are ārūdhas. If we are looking into the actual practice, there also we would not see these 77 indices are called ārūdhas. However, those who argue that, there are 108 ārūdhas, includes these indices too as ārūdhas. This misunderstanding has resulted not only creating confusion among those who are involved in jyotiṣa studies, but

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also in degrading the very practice of praśna.

In Praśnamārga is the celebrated work on praśna consisting of 32 Chapters with 2634slokas. It mentions several praśnas, viz., vivāhpraśna, Rājapraśna, Kūpapraśna, Bhojanapraśna, Suratapraśna, Varṣapraśna, Naṣtapraśna, Moṣṇapraśna, Devapraśna, Mrugayāpraśna, Santatipraśna, Garbhapraśna, Proṣitāgamanapraśna, Muṣtipraśna, Swapnapraśna. But, there is no mention about Aṣṭamangala praśna and Tambūlapraśna. Even these words are not appearing in the text. These names and practices might have emerged according to the needs of the individual concerned and the locality of practice. By that I mean, these practices has no sanction of the ācāryas.

II

To establish the importance of Praśna I will discuss below a central concept in astrological thinking, time division. This discussion will also reveal the centrality of praśna in the whole six division of astrological knowledge. Time in praśna has been conceived by dividing it into sixteen divisions. Among these, nine divisions are already known to all since it is dealing with varṣa (year), ayana (half a year), rtu (bi-month), māsa (month), pakṣa (bi-week), vāra (week), divasa (24 hours), dina (day time), rātri (night). But the remaining eight are less known. A close view on the calculation of these eight divisions and its effects will prove our argument that, time is central in Prasna as well. These eight divisions are: muhūrta, kālahora, lagna, yāma, grahodaya, bhūtodaya, nādi, and ahna. All these are identified after dividing dina (day time). The ways to calculate these fragmentations of dina and its effects will be discussed below.

1. Muhūrta

Amarakosa defines that, muhūrta is a nadikadwayam, two nadika. A nadika is 24 minutes, therefore two nadika means 48 minutes. In Prasna, muhūrta is calculated by dividing a day (divasa-24 hours) by thirty. That is, $24\text{hrs}=1440\text{mts}/48\text{minutes}=30\text{ muhūrtas}$. Therefore, there will be 30 muhūrtas in a day, fifteen during daytime and fifteen during night. Each muhūrta has its own name. They are given below:

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Muhūrta during Daytime

1. Ārdra
2. Uruga
3. Mitra
4. Magha
5. Vasu
6. Jala
7. Viśwa
8. Abhijit
9. Viriñca
10. Indra
11. Indrāgni
12. Mūlam
13. Varuṇa
14. Yama
15. Bhaga

Muhūrta during night

- Rudra
- Bhadra
- Budhni
- Powṣṇa
- Aświ
- Yama
- Agni
- Brahma
- Candra
- Aditi
- Guru
- Viṣṇu
- Hasta
- Brahma
- Samīra

Now I will discuss about the auspicious and inauspicious muhūrtas. In daytime muhūrtas 1, 2, 10, 11, 12, 14 are inauspicious. The remaining muhūrtas are considered auspicious. During night muhūrtas 1, 6, 7, are inauspicious and the remaining are auspicious. Now I will explain how to find out a muhūrta. If a person is coming and raising the question, first we will find the time of the utterance of the question. Suppose, if it is 11-06am, we will calculate the muhūrta the following line. If the time of the rise of sun on that day is 6-20 and sun set is 18-50 then dina is $(18-50) - (6-20) = 12-30$ hrs. Therefore, muhūrta is equal to $12-30/15 = 50$ mts. This will be one muhūrta duration on that particular day.

Now we need to calculate the muhūrta in which the question is raised. This we can calculate by doing the following way. 11-06 (time of raising the question) - 6-20am (time of sunrise) = 4 hours 46 minutes or 286 minutes. Then the muhūrta of asking question is $286/50 = 6$ thmuhūrta. 6thmuhūrta during daytime in the above table is jala, which is considered as auspicious muhūrta.

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Likewise muhūrta of night too could be identified. If the time of asking question is 11-06pm then duration of effective night time will be 11-30 hours. Therefore muhūrta duration will be 46 minutes. To arrive at muhūrta then we follow the calculation given below:

11-06 p.m. (the time of asking question) - 6-50 pm (the time of sunset) = 256minutes. $256/50 = 6\text{thmuhurta}$. Sixth muhūrta during night is yāma, which is considered inauspicious.

2. Kālahora

Kālahora is one out of the 12 divisions of the dina (daytime). There is a Lord for each kālahora. Altogether there are seven Lords viz., Ravi (RA), Candra (CH), Kuja (KU), Budha (BU), Guru (GU), Śukra (SU), and Manda (MA).

Day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Sunday	RA	SU	BU	CH	MA	GU	KU	RA	SU	BU	CH	MA
Monday	CH	MA	GU	KU	RA	SU	BU	CH	MA	GU	KU	RA
Tuesday	KU	RA	SU	BU	CH	MA	GU	KU	RA	SU	BU	CH
Wednesday	BU	CH	MA	GU	KU	RA	SU	BU	CH	MA	GU	KU
Thursday	GU	KU	RA	SU	BU	CH	MA	GU	KU	RA	SU	BU
Friday	SU	BU	CH	MA	GU	KU	RA	SU	BU	CH	MA	GU
Saturday	MA	GU	KU	RA	SU	BU	CH	MA	GU	KU	RA	SU

Now I will explain the way to calculate kālahora. I will take the time of asking question as taken above then proceed with the calculation. Time of asking question is 11-06am. Sunrise 6-20. Sunset 6-50. Dina = 12-30hours.

Day Monday

Therefore, Kālahora is

$12-30 \text{ hours}/12 \text{ (divisions)} = 1 \text{ hours } 2 \text{ minutes } 30 \text{ seconds}$, which is equal to 62 minutes 30 seconds.

$11-06\text{am} - 6-20\text{am} = 4 \text{ hours } 46\text{minutes}$, which is equal to 286 minutes.

$286 \text{ minutes}/62-30 = 5\text{thkālahora}$

The table shows that 5thkālahora on Monday is Ravi, which is in-

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auspicious. Praśna conceives that kālahora of Ravi, Kuja and Śani as inauspicious and Candra, Buda, Śukra, Guru as auspicious. It is a fact that, there are other intricacies involved in considering kālahora while making prediction. It all is read and calculated according to the specific context of the actual calculation.

3. Lagna

Lagna is the rising sign at the time of asking the question. It is also called udayalagna. The effects (whether auspicious or inauspicious) of the lagna is fundamental in all Praśna predictions. Predications will be made by looking at the relation of all planets and their bhāva in relation to udayalagna.

4. Yāma

Yāma is identified by dividing each day and night into eight. The way to calculate yāma is given below:

Day = Monday

Time of asking question = 11-06am

Sunrise = 6-20

Sunset = 6-50

Dina = 12-30 hours

Night = 11-30 hours

Therefore, yāma during daytime is

$12-30/8 = 1 \text{ hours } 33 \text{ minutes } 45 \text{ seconds}$, which is equal to 93.75 minutes

Yāma during night is

$11-30/8 = 1 \text{ hours } 26 \text{ minutes } 15 \text{ seconds}$, which is equal to 86.25 minutes.

$11-06 \text{ am} - 6-20 \text{ am} = 4 \text{ hours } 46 \text{ minutes} = 286 \text{ minutes}$

$286/93.75 = 4\text{th yāma}$.

Up to 11-01-15 am it is third yāma. Therefore, a question raised at 11-06am will be in 4th yāma.

During night

$11-06\text{pm} - 6-50\text{pm} = 4 \text{ hours } 16 \text{ minutes} = 256\text{minutes}$

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256/86.25 = 3rdyāma.

Up to 11-08-45 it is third yāma. Therefore, it is third yāma.

Each yāma has eight planets as Lords. See the table given below:

Day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
SUNDAY	RA	CH	KU	BU	GU	ŚU	ŚANI	RĀHU
MONDAY	CH	KU	BU	GU	ŚU	ŚANI	RĀHU	RA
TUESDAY	KU	BU	GU	ŚU	ŚANI	RĀHU	RA	CH
Wednesday	BU	GU	ŚU	ŚANI	RĀHU	RA	CH	KU
Thursday	GU	ŚU	ŚANI	RĀHU	RA	CH	KU	BU
FRIDAY	ŚU	ŚANI	RĀHU	RA	CH	KU	BU	GU
Saturday	ŚANI	RAHU	RA	CH	KU	BU	GU	ŚU

During night

Day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Sunday	GU	ŚU	ŚANI	RĀHU	RA	CH	KU	BU
Monday	ŚU	ŚANI	RĀHU	RA	CH	KU	BU	GU
Tuesday	ŚANI	RĀHU	RA	CH	KU	BU	GU	ŚU
Wednesday	RA	CH	KU	BU	GU	ŚU	ŚANI	RĀHU
Thursday	CH	KU	BU	GU	ŚU	ŚANI	RĀHU	RA
Friday	KU	BU	GU	ŚU	ŚANI	RĀHU	RA	CH
Saturday	BU	GU	ŚU	ŚANI	RĀHU	RA	CH	KU

5. GRAHODAYA

From the above given table we can find out that the Lord of the 4th yāma of Monday is Budha. Likewise, the Lord of the third yāma during night is Rāhu. Since the time of asking the question is 11-06am, the grahodaya of that time is Budha. If it is 11-06pm during night, Grahodaya will be Rāhu. Among the Lords given in the table above, GU, BU, ŚU are considered the most auspicious. CH is considered as standing in between the auspicious and inauspicious but with a positive turn. KU, ŚANI, RĀHU and RA are considered inauspicious.

Yet another factor to be noted here is that each yāma has a name of its own. For example, the yāma of Śani is called Gulikakālam and the yāma of Rāhu is called Rāhukālam. Further, yāma of Budha is called

Ardhpraharakālam, yāma of Guru is called Yamakantakakālam and yāma of Śukra is called Yāmasūkrakālam. This could be deduced from the tables given above. But there is an interesting point to be noted here, that, now the astrologers of Kerala is not applying the positions and its movement of Rāhu given in the table above to reckon Rāhukālam.

6. BHŪTODAYAM

Praśna tells that there are five bhūtas namely, Prithvī, Jalam, Agni, Vāyu and Ākāśam. According to them all these bhūtas appear in a yāma. Or in other words, a yāma goes through all the five bhūtas. As I said earlier there are eight yāmas during daytime. Praśna tells that there are two orders of bhūtas affecting a yāma. First among these is calculated looking at the odd yāmas and the second by looking at even yāmas. The order of odd yāma is Prithvī (30 minutes), Jalam (24mts), Agni (18mts), Vāyu (12mts) and Ākāśam (6mts). The order of even yāma is, Ākāśam (6mts), Vāyu (12mts), Agni (18mts), Jalam (24mts), and Prithvī (30mts). This time distribution is calculated assuming that a yāma has 1 hour and 30 minutes. The means to get the time duration of bhūta is the following:

First, Ākāśam is calculated by dividing yāma by 15. That is 1hour 30minutes divided by 15, which will be 6minutes. Two times of the duration of Ākāśam will be the duration of Vāyu. Three times of Ākāśam will be the duration of Agni, when it is four times it is Jalam and the five times will be Prithvī.

An example of calculating bhūtodayam will be given below.

Time of asking question 11-06am

Sunrise= 6-20 and sunset 18-50.

Yāma= 1hrs 30mts 45sec.

Up to 11-01-15am it is third yāma. Since third yāma ends at 11-01-15am and the time of asking question falls at 11-06am, it is fourth yāma. Fourth yāma is an even yāma. This shows that, here to find out bhūtodayam we must consider the even order of bhūta. Since 11-06 falls in the first four minutes of the fourth yāma it is Ākāśam. It is Ākāśam since up to first six minutes bhūta will be Ākāśam according to the even order of the bhūta.

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The following is the table showing the auspicious and inauspicious association of bhūtas.

Prthvī = inauspicious

Jalam = auspicious

Agni = death and quarrel

Vāyu = auspicious

Ākāśam = inauspicious

7. Nādi

Here the first step is, find nādi and vinādi after sunrise. If it is 'n' then we first multiply 'n' with 4 and the result will be divided by seven. If the remainder of the division is 1 it is death (maraṇanādi), if it is 2, it is restlessness, if it is 3 it is quarrel, if it is 4 it is peacefulness, if it is 5, it is voyage, if it is 6, it is with wife, and if it is 7 it is obstacle/imprisonment.

Taking the example given above I will detail the calculation.

11-06 - 6-20 = 4-46 = 11 nādi 55 vinādi (4-46x2.5)

11-55 (n and v) x 4 = 47-40/7 = remainder is 6.

8. Ahna

It is a division of daytime into five. They are, Prāhna, Pūrvāhna, Madhyāhna, Aparāhna and Sāyāhna. It is calculated by dividing daytime which is 12 hours by 5. Therefore, each Ahna will be having 2 hours 24 minutes. Among the five Ahnas the first two are considered auspicious, the middle one is neither auspicious nor inauspicious, and the last two are inauspicious. If we continue with the example taken above for 11-06am the Ahna will be the second one, which is auspicious.

Conclusion

The discussion above showed the importance of praśna as a form of astrological knowledge. I have also discussed the difference between praśna and jātaka so as to establish that unlike others think, praśna is not a 'horary astrology', rather, it has potentiality to understand the condition and process of human life. To establish its potential and importance I discussed at length the concept of time division in praśna. The discussion made above

also showed that, the concept of time and its division in Praśna is very elaborate. Since it has not been seriously looked into by the earlier interpreters of Praśna (as well as other astrological texts) and scholars as well as practitioners of astrology (except practitioners from Kerala) did not take Praśna seriously. This resulted in ranking Praśna below in the hierarchy of astrological knowledge.

Notes and References:

- i) Praśnamārga chapter 1, stanza :45
Ibid, stanza.. 46
- ii) ibid : 47
- iii) ibid : 33
- iv) ibid : 34
- v) ibid : 35
- vi) ibid : 39
- vii) ibid : 40
- viii) ibid : 36,37
- ix) ibid : 42
- x) ibid : 43: Do 44
- xi) ibid : 45
- xii) Praśnamārga chapter 1, stanza 7
- xiii) ibid : 11