

Makara

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Makara

??? • **Makara**, the sea-creature — not a goat, but the composite river-beast of Indian art, part crocodile and part fish, the mount of the river-goddess Ganga and the emblem on Kamadeva's banner. The tenth rashi, running **14 January – 12 February** here, ruled by **Shani** (Saturn), of the element **prithvi** (earth) and the **chara** (movable) quality. Its tropical counterpart is **Capricorn**. In the Kalapurusha it holds the knees. Mangala reaches his exaltation at 28° Makara and Brihaspati his debilitation at 5°.

Religion

Jyotisha is one of the six **Vedangas**, the limbs of the Veda, and is called its eye. Of the twelve rashis, Makara is the one the largest number of people notice, because the Sun's entry into it is the most widely kept solar date in the Hindu year.

Its lord Shani is the son of Surya and Chhaya, the shadow — a graha understood less as a bringer of bad luck than as the one who returns exactly what is owed. His day is Saturday, his metal iron, his offerings black sesame, mustard oil and dark cloth. Shani Shingnapur in Maharashtra is his best-known shrine, and Thirunallar in the Kaveri delta is his temple in the nine-temple Navagraha circuit, where pilgrims bathe in the Nala Tirtham before darshan. He stands in the Navagraha shrine of most South Indian temples. **Sade Sati**, his seven-and-a-half-year transit over the natal Moon's sign and its neighbours, is probably the single most-feared period in popular Jyotisha; the remedies are *graha shanti* — japa, homa, Saturday observance, *dana* — with Hanuman worship widespread alongside them.

The nakshatras in Makara:

Nakshatra	Padas in Makara	Deity	Graha
Uttara Ashadha	2–4	the Vishvedevas, the All-Gods	Surya
Shravana	1–4	Vishnu	Chandra
Dhanishta	1–2	the Vasus, the eight elemental gods	Mangala

Shravana is Vishnu's own nakshatra — the name means "hearing", and its symbol is an ear or three footprints, read against Vishnu's three strides. It is one of the most favoured nakshatras in **muhurta** for learning, listening and beginnings; Uttara Ashadha is favoured for what must endure. Naming syllables at **Namakarana** are taken from the pada of the Moon's nakshatra — Ju, Je, Jo and Gha for Shravana, in one common reckoning — and **Annaprashana**, **Upanayana** and the wedding hour are elected from the same tables. Makara enters marriage matching through the Bhakut kuta of the thirty-six *kuta* points.

Key dates

Date	Event	Note
c. 1200–900 BCE	Nakshatra lists in the Yajurveda and Atharvaveda	Shravana and Dhanishta among the earliest ordered lists.

c. 700–500 BCE	<i>Vedanga Jyotisha</i> of Lagadha	Earliest surviving Indian astronomical text; its five-year cycle begins at the winter solstice in Dhanishta, which is the basis for dating its observations to c. 1400–1200 BCE. All of these figures are disputed.
c. 2nd–3rd c. CE	<i>Yavanajataka</i> and Greek transmission	The Greek goat-fish and the Indian makara meet. Pingree dated Sphujidhvaja to 269/270 CE; Mak (2013) rejects the reading.
499 CE	Aryabhata's <i>Aryabhatiya</i>	The solar model behind the ingress.
6th c. CE	Varahamihira, <i>Brihat Jataka</i> and <i>Brihat Samhita</i>	Makara's classical significations.
c. 4th–10th c. CE	<i>Surya Siddhanta</i>	Contested range.
1955	Lahiri ayanamsa adopted	Why Makara Sankranti now falls on 14–15 January rather than at the solstice.
~14 January, annually	Makara Sankranti	The great one.

Makara Sankranti carries **Thai Pongal** in Tamil Nadu, the harvest thanksgiving whose first pot of new rice is boiled over at sunrise; **Magh Bihu** in Assam; **Lohri** on the eve and **Maghi** in Punjab, the latter a Sikh observance for the forty Muktas of Muktsar; **Uttarayan** in Gujarat; **Khichdi** in Uttar Pradesh; **Maghe Sankranti** in Nepal; the **Ganga Sagar Mela** at Sagar Island; and one of the principal bathing days of the Magh Mela and Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj. These are religious observances, kept with bathing, offering and temple attendance, not merely public holidays.

The day is also called the start of **Uttarayana**, the Sun's northern course and the "day of the gods" — the half-year the dying Bhishma waits for in the *Mahabharata* before releasing his life. The honest note is that Uttarayana and Makara Sankranti have come apart: the solstice now falls around 21 December, some three and a half weeks earlier, because the tropical year and the sidereal signs drift against each other. Practice kept the sidereal date.

In the year

Makara runs mid-January to mid-February, the cold-weather harvest and the biggest bathing days of the Indian religious calendar. It sits about twenty-four days behind tropical [Capricorn](#) for the same reason the whole system does: the Western signs are counted from the March equinox, which precesses westward roughly one degree every seventy-two years, while Jyotisha holds its zero point against the stars. The gap is close to 24° now, and the Lahiri ayanamsa is the number India uses to state it.

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