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Gandanta – The Drowning Point

The precise position of a planet within the zodiac can dramatically shape how its energies are expressed and experienced. Not all parts of the zodiac are created equal. Certain degrees or zones can be empowering, offering clarity, focus, and the potential to bring blessings, while others may carry inherent complexities and challenges, sometimes indicating the possibility of suffering or hardship.

For example, when a planet occupies its degree or sign of exaltation or debilitation, such a placement profoundly influences the strength with which that planet expresses its nature, altering how it functions, the tone it sets, and the outcomes it tends to produce, for better or worse.

Similarly, the *nakshatra* a planet occupies, or its conjunction with a significant fixed star, can greatly modify its implications in various areas of life. To illustrate, a planet placed in the *nakshatra* Magha, tightly conjunct the degree of the fixed star Regulus (the heart of the lion), benefits from a boost of radiance, eminence, and regal presence. This placement often enhances leadership qualities and confidence. In contrast, a planet in the *nakshatra* Ardra may endure many tears and storms, experiencing turmoil and intense emotional upheaval.

When evaluating a planet's placement within the zodiac, it is especially important to note if it falls in *sandhi* or *gandanta*, transitional points where its energy is often weakened, confused, or obstructed.

Sandhi, which literally means “joint” in Sanskrit, refers to the junction at the very beginning or end of a zodiac sign, usually within the first or last degree. This is a transitional space where two distinct energies overlap. As a result, a planet placed in *sandhi* is often rendered weak, due to the blending of two different forces, each retaining its own characteristics. Such a planet is confused, lacking clarity and direction, as it is influenced simultaneously by both the sign it is leaving and the one it is entering.

Classical texts describe planets in this position as having *bala* (infant) or *mrita* (dead) *avastha* (state), suggesting that they are either too immature or too depleted to function effectively. Consequently, a planet in *sandhi* is weak and struggles to express itself fully, consistently or coherently.

Gandanta is an especially critical and complex juncture. It marks the transition not only between two signs but also between two nakshatras. Specifically, a planet located between the last 3 degrees 20 minutes of a water sign and the first 3 degrees 20 minutes of a fire sign, is in *gandanta*. This placement not only adversely affects the strength with which a planet expresses itself, but also often points to significant karmic challenges and transformative life experiences.

Water represents dissolution, cleansing, and emotional depth, while fire symbolizes creation and illumination. Fire can evaporate water, and water can extinguish fire. The shift from water to fire introduces unstable, uncertain, and disruptive energies, especially when flavored by two very different nakshatras.

Gandanta is often described as a knot, an entanglement that is difficult to unravel, symbolizing deep-seated, persistent challenges in life. *Gandanta* at the end of a water sign is also referred to as the “drowning point,” as it lies in the deepest waters.

The *Brihat Parashara Hora Shastra* warns that *gandanta* placements tend to bring difficult or evil effects and therefore require remedies or measures to counteract their difficulties and reduce their adverse impacts.

Following is an example chart featuring a *gandanta* placement, that of Isabelle Eberhardt, which serves as a near textbook illustration of the symbolism involved and is especially telling.

Isabelle Eberhardt

Eberhardt was a Swiss-Russian explorer, author, war correspondent, and desert wanderer who defied societal norms. A marginal and eccentric figure, she spent much of her life in destitution. Although her time on Earth was brief, spanning merely 27 years, the impact of her unique personality, captivating life story, and literary work has far outlived her. To this day, she continues to fascinate, puzzle and intrigue scholars, filmmakers, and admirers around the world.

Eberhardt was the illegitimate daughter of a Russian noblewoman and her lover, the family tutor. Raised outside Geneva, she was homeschooled by her father who believed that girls should receive the same education as boys. Under his guidance, she followed an eclectic study program, mastering seven languages, including Arabic, by the age of twenty. She developed a deep understanding of Islam, convinced she had been born a Muslim.

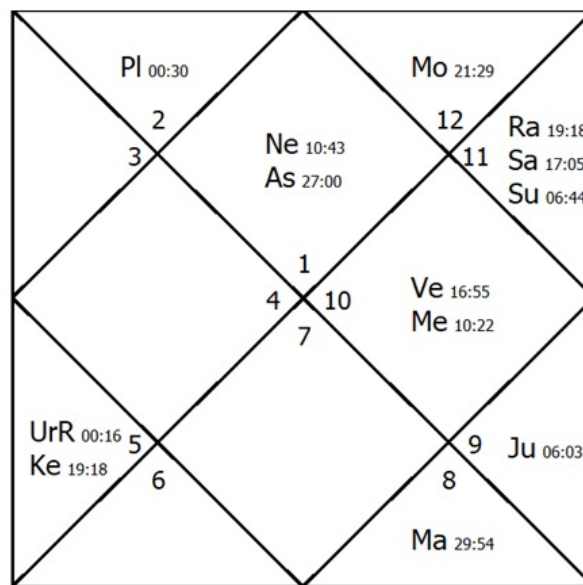
Fascinated by North Africa, Eberhardt published her first story and essay on the Maghreb under a male pseudonym at eighteen. Much of her knowledge came from a pen pal in the Sahara, yet her writing was remarkably sophisticated for her age. In 1897, driven by an insatiable longing to experience Algeria, she moved there with her mother. However, just months after their arrival, her mother died unexpectedly of a heart attack. At twenty, she found herself “*alone, unknown, with few needs*” in a foreign land, feeling both like an outsider and at home, “*walking grandly and solitarily in conquest of the world.*”

Eberhardt's life in Algeria was one of stark contrasts. Although European, she was an anti-colonialist, participating in uprisings and opposing the French police. As a woman, she often dressed as a young Arab man, adopting the name Mahmoud Saadi to present herself to sheikhs and tribal chiefs.

A mystic and Sufi practitioner, Eberhardt was also a poet, capable of creating exquisite verses that captured the essence of Maghreb life. Yet her reality was far from poetic: she endured harsh conditions, sharing tents with Bedouins and sometimes sleeping on the streets in a ravaged state. Devoted to Islam and well-versed in the Qur'an, she earned the respect of local scholars. However, her lifestyle was one of contradictions; she was also a heavy drinker, smoker, and opium addict, with a seemingly endless number of lovers.

In 1901, she married Ehni, a sickly, intellectually inferior Algerian soldier. That same year, she survived an assassination attempt when a man, possibly hired by an ex-lover or the French administration, stabbed her in the arm. Although she survived, her health deteriorated from years of hardship, substance abuse, and reckless living, compounded by bouts of malaria and syphilis. In 1904, her life ended tragically in the Saharan desert, where she perished in a flash flood.

Mo 21:29	Ne 10:43 As 27:00	Pl 00:30	
Ra 19:18 Sa 17:05 Su 06:44	Isabelle Eberhardt		
Ve 16:55 Me 10:22			UrR 00:16 Ke 19:18
Ju 06:03	Ma 29:54		



Eberhardt's chart is nothing short of extraordinary. It features three powerful planets in their own signs, multiple yogas, a striking eighth house signature, an intriguing Mars in *gandanta*, and other notable planetary placements, each rich enough to warrant a deep dive of their own. Hers is a chart that draws you in with a kind of simple complexity, like a novel you can't put down or stop talking about.

Eberhardt's *lagna* is in Aries/Krittika, occupied by Neptune and aspected by Saturn and Jupiter, both of which are strongly placed in their own signs. Her *lagnesh* Mars is also *swa rashi* in

Scorpio, but located in the eighth house, in the eighth sign of the zodiac. There, it's afflicted by the aspect of Saturn and, most crucially, positioned in *gandanta*.

In addition to ruling the chart, Mars holds the highest degree among all the planets, making it her *Atmakaraka*, or soul indicator. *Atmakaraka* reveals the soul's flavor, its karmic baggage, and the key lessons it must confront and grow through in this lifetime.

Her chart contains a distinct astrological signature for fearlessness, intensity and passion. Her strong Mars, both the *lagnesh* and *Atmakaraka*, is in the eighth house of transformation, death and rebirth. Add to this her *lagna* in Aries/Krittika, and her Sun, *karaka* for the Self, also influenced by Mars, and her instinct for adventure becomes unparalleled. Eberhardt rarely lingered in indecision; she seemed to know exactly where she wanted to be, what she wanted to do, or whom she wanted to be with. She chose to walk a daring path, one that was always outside her comfort zone.

An independent Martian, a Krittika warrior sharp as a blade, she cut through norms, ethics, morality, and societal order as she pleased, giving little thought to the consequences of her actions and words. With a sharp tongue, a hot temper, and a powerful sex drive, she lived as a man would, disguised in men's clothing and constantly in the company of men.

Growing up under her father's supervision, she'd been raised as a boy. She rode horses, did physical labor, and was instructed to dress as a boy whenever she went out in public. During her adolescence, she'd roam the streets of Geneva alone, dressed in male clothing, her hair cropped, drinking beer in cafés with sailors. In one of her letters, she recounts kissing one of those sailors at length in public, taking pleasure in it, possibly due to the taboo-breaking and the homoerotic role-playing nature of the act.

Later, in Algeria, she rubbed shoulders with men of all ranks and professions, sheikhs, tribal chiefs, scholars, authors, journalists, and soldiers. She rode horses, fired guns, carried knives, and even took part in uprisings against authority figures.

With Mars strong in the eighth house, she had a voracious appetite for sex and was highly promiscuous. While her black-and-white photos often capture a stillness in her face and eyes, she was anything but still when it came to engaging in sexual pursuits. She would "*beckon anyone she wanted over, and off they would go.*"

She delighted in surprising her lovers by revealing the woman hidden beneath her male clothing. However, D'Eaubonne, one of her biographers, offered a different interpretation. He suggested that "*her male disguise was essential to her sexual pathology,*" proposing that she presented herself as a boy because "*she wished to make love like a boy, by taking the passive role in anal intercourse.*" Her friend Barrucand who published most of her remaining manuscripts after her death, claimed that she was "*amenorrheic, into rough sex and infected with syphilis.*"

Mars is an extremely focal planet in Eberhardt's chart, not only because it's her *lagnesh*, *Atmakaraka*, and the planet that fuels many of her defining traits, but also due to its placement in *gandanta*, more specifically in *Abhukta Mula Gandanta*, the karmic junction between Scorpio/Jyestha and Sagittarius/Mula.

Abhukta Mula Gandanta is considered one of the most inauspicious points in the zodiac. The term “*abhukta*” means “denied food for sustenance” or “unused,” implying that the gifts of any planets placed here may not be fully realized or enjoyed. *Lagna* and Moon in this position are especially viewed as *doshas* in classical texts, but any planet here can bring trauma, misfortune, and suffering related to the planet’s nature and rulership.

Eberhardt’s *Atmakaraka*, *lagnesh*, and eighth lord Mars, although strong in its own sign, is situated in this extremely inauspicious *gandanta* in a *trikasthan*a and afflicted by Saturn. This placement suggests confusion surrounding her sense of self, identity, and purpose while also making her vulnerable to disease, calamity, violence, and a potentially short lifespan. It paints a picture of a life filled with intense challenges, pointing to a karmic birth tied to a higher purpose.

Interestingly, Eberhardt herself believed she was born under an evil sign. Fatalistic by nature, she accepted suffering as part of a greater cause and found sorrow to be perhaps the only aspect of life she didn’t rebel against. In her own words, she reflected on the mystery surrounding her fate:

“God alone knows – I shall not know who I am, or what is the reason or the point of my destiny, one of the most incredible there has ever been. Yet it seems to be that I am not destined to disappear without having some understanding of the whole mystery which has surrounded my life from its strange beginnings to the present day.”

Adding to the already complex energy of *lagnesh* Mars in *gandanta* is Neptune in the first house. Here, Neptune dissolves clear boundaries, creating confusion not only about how she was perceived by others, but also about her own sense of self. This was marked by her constant search for identity, often expressed through a cycle of intense connection followed by detachment. Her sense of self was fluid, ever-shifting, elusive, and difficult to pin down.

Her Sun in Aquarius/Shatabisha, conjunct Saturn and Rahu, defined how this elusive, non-confirming energy manifested. A humanitarian and idealist, she fought against what she saw as injustice. She was also a rebel and an outcast, rejecting both Western and Arabic societal norms. The symbol of the *nakshatra* Shatabisha, a hidden circle, further reinforces her enigmatic and mysterious nature.

Complementing this elusive solar and Neptunian energy is her *Kemadruma* Moon in the twelfth house in Pisces/Revati. Combined with Neptune’s influence, it suggests a selfless, solitary, and spiritual nature, yet one also prone to escapism, addiction, and emotional instability. With a fatalistic outlook, she was at times perceived as “*too lazy to live*.” Her personality was magnetic, yet enigmatic—blending genius, kindness, perversity, and madness. A mystic wanderer, she was drawn to life’s many contradictions.

Shifting focus, it’s a relief to see that her Jupiter is *swa rashi* in Sagittarius, in the ninth house of higher learning, religion, spirituality, and beliefs, untroubled by malefic influences. It also forms a *Hamsa Yoga* from the Moon. Eberhardt’s education under her father’s guidance shaped her into an intelligent, well-informed, and multilingual individual. A devoted Muslim with a deep understanding of the Qur’an, she was also part of a Sufi brotherhood. Radical in her views, she

fought for justice, feminism and anti-colonialism. She defied convention and pursued what she believed was right. Spiritual, fanatical, and fatalistic, her beliefs led her to embrace suffering as a form of spiritual beauty.

Eberhardt believed that it was her destiny to write, just as it was her destiny to suffer. With Mercury, lord of her third house and the *karaka* for writing, conjunct Venus in the tenth house, she was highly skilled with words. Writing served not only to express her pain but also to fulfill her creative purpose.

When her time came to leave the material world, she did so with the same intensity that had defined her life. Eberhardt passed away in October 1904, during her Venus-Rahu period. *Mahadasha* lord Venus rules both the second and seventh houses, making it a double *marakesh* (death-inflicting planet) in her chart. Its *nakshatra* dispositor, the Moon, is placed in the twelfth sign of Pisces and the twelfth house of loss and liberation, suggesting karmic release. Her Moon resides in Revati *nakshatra*, whose ruling deity, Pushan, governs the safe passage of the soul from the living to the dead, reinforcing the theme of karmic closure and transition.

A strong water theme runs through her chart, not only in the symbolism of Pisces and Revati, but also through the *bhukti* lord Rahu in its own sign of Aquarius, the water-bearer, and its *nakshatra* Shatabisha associated with Varuna, the god of water and cosmic order. Her Sun, the *karaka* for Self and physical health, is situated here alongside Rahu and Saturn, and aspected by Mars, thus afflicted in this *nakshatra* by all the malefics in the chart.

Eberhardt died in a flash flood in the Sahara. With *lagnesh* Mars afflicted by Saturn in the eighth house of calamities and placed in *gandanta*, a karmic knot also known as the “drowning point,” she literally drowned in the desert: a death as fated and paradoxical as her life.

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Odelia Eskinazi has been studying and practicing *Jyotish* since 2014, with a keen interest in its psychological and medical dimensions. She’s studied with Joni Patry, James Kelleher and Alan Annand, and was the editor for Annand’s book *Kama Yoga*. She also writes the “Who’s in the News” column for Patry’s *Astrology Insights*. Widely traveled, she has a deep appreciation for foreign cultures and cross-cultural exchange. Her interest in consciousness, healing, and transformation has led her to explore related fields, including attending several workshops with Vernon Frost. In her “real life,” she works as the financial controller of a multinational company. Her recently-published book ***Patterns of Contrast in Vedic Astrology*** offers a thoughtful examination of several *yogas* in *Jyotish* that illuminate the phenomenon of reversals in life.