

BHAKTIVEDANTA RESEARCH CENTRE NEWSLETTER 14, May-July 2016



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Bhaktivedanta Research Centre·Monday, August 1, 2016

Manuscript Mission Update

For the last three months, our roving BRC manuscript mission team has been visiting libraries in the Howrah District. Although located to the west of the Kolkata area, some of the locations require travel of more than three hours. It can be a challenge for our manuscript team as many library locations are so far off the beaten path, they have no shops or facility for meals.

We are currently traveling in the Howrah district after receiving authorization from the Howrah District Library Officer (DLO) which makes getting access to Government run or Government affiliated branches much easier. Even though our cataloging, preserving and digitizing old and endangered manuscripts is done at the BRC's expense, we sometimes encounter opposition for various reasons.

So far this quarter, we visited the Maju Public Library, finding 147 manuscripts, the Makardaha Saraswat Library uncovering 467 manuscripts, and a huge discovery at the Madhiary Public Library of over 1000 rare manuscripts.

When we arrive at a location, often the old manuscripts, made of either palm leaves, birch bark, or traditional hand made paper, are in various stages of disarray and decay. This is primarily due to there being no incentive to the libraries to look after them with little to no demand for their use.

When we depart, each library left with a catalogue of each work in their possession, each manuscript neatly packed in an insect repellent red cloth, and digital copies of any works deemed significant by the team. Usually this means Vaishnava, Gaudiya or other important Vedic literature.

Of course, all collected images also become a part of the permanent BRC digital manuscript collection.



Bharati Roy catalogs and applies preservation techniques on manuscripts

Thanks Again to the M.K. Goswami family



Full set of Srimad Bhagavatam, Murshidabad edition

BRC wishes to express thanks to Sri M.K. Goswami and Srimati Priti Rekha Goswami of Bangalore. The Goswami family, who are directly descended from Sri Advaita Acharya Prabhu, gifted over 40 rare

manuscripts to the library last February. They made another generous donation last May— a rare set of Srimad Bhagavatam originally commissioned by the King of Tripura, known as the Murshidabad edition.

BRC Receives Rare Urdu Bhagavad-Gita

On a recent visit to Mayapur, Hari Sauri made a received a special addition to the Research Library’s catalogue. A century old Bhagavad Gita with commentary in the Urdu language was donated by Ravanari Prabhu, Srila Prabhupada’s first Middle Eastern disciple (Please read next article). Urdu is a Persian influenced dialect spoken primarily by Muslims in India and Pakistan. It was originally published by a Pandit named Rai Bahadur Madan Dehlavi from Kashmir. It is replete with several beautiful illustrations, including many esoteric looking maps depicting various aspects of Vedic Cosmology annotated in the Urdu language.

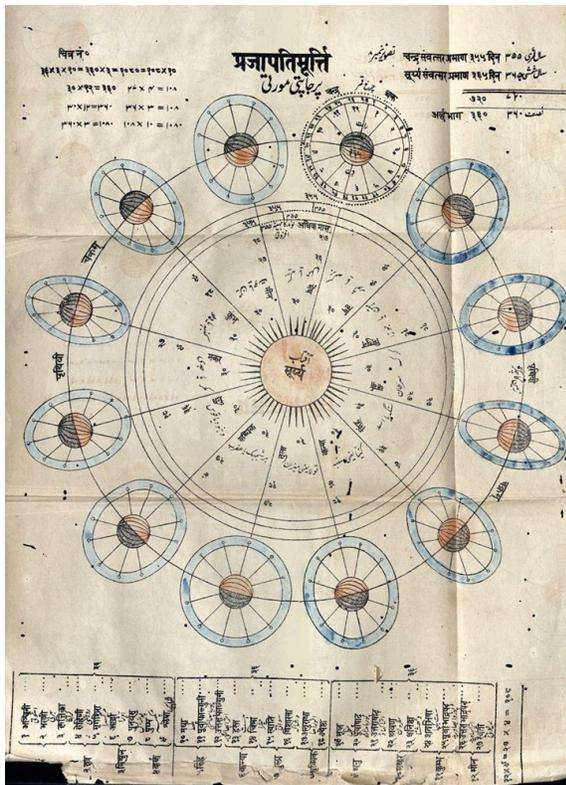
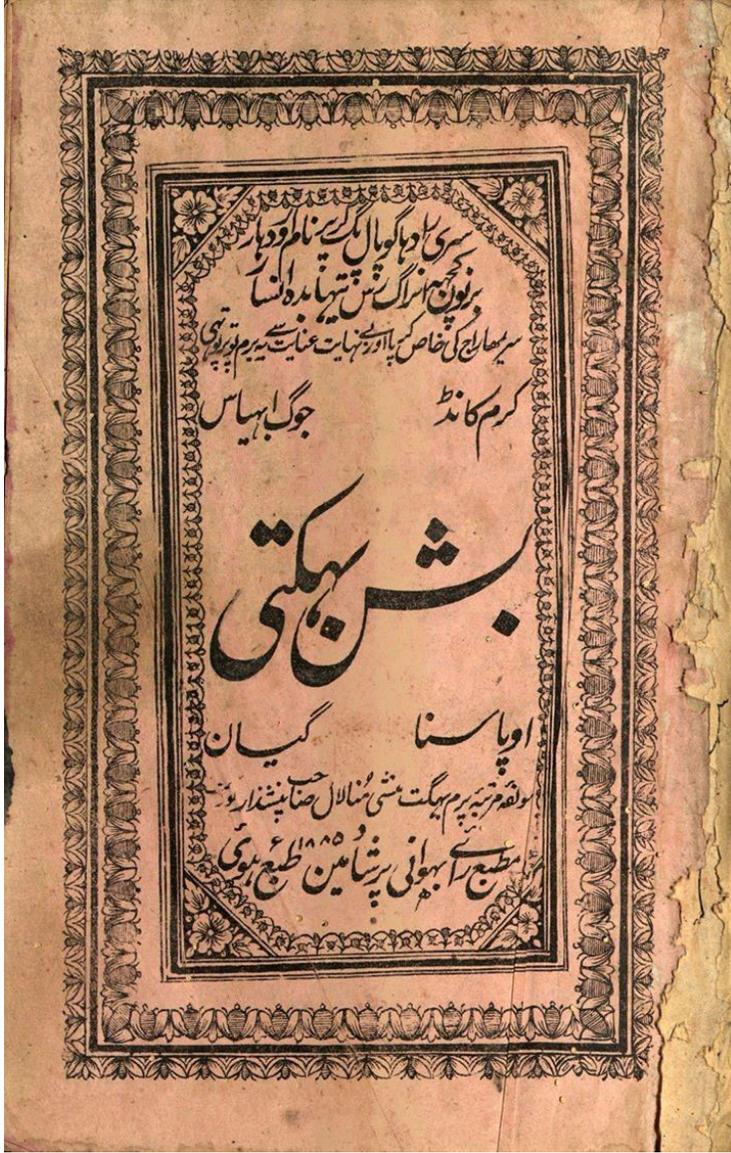


image from Urdu Gita

Our Chief Librarian, Acyuta Prabhu, located an Urdu translator who was provided with the scans. He informed us this edition was published in 1906. The first page of the book reads “Janaki Nath composes Persian couplets and quatrains (rubā’iyat) in order to recast the original content of the Gītā. Each verse is followed by Urdu commentary.” The translator added that the illustrations seemed to assign mystical significance to the number of verses found in each chapter.



from Bishan Bhakti, (Devotion to Visnu)

To our surprise, he pointed out there were actually two books within the binding, a practice common at that time. The second book, "The Devotion of Viṣṇu," also composed in Urdu, was published in 1885 and authored by one Munshī Munna Lāl Ṣāheb.

The Library staff commented how striking it is to hold in your hands old devotional Vaishnava texts written in the exotic cursive Arabic script. More gems for the BRC treasure vault.

BRC Honored by Visit from His Grace Ravanari Prabhu

Born in Israel of a Palestinian mother and father, Ravanari prabhu joined ISKCON in 1973 in Germany.

He heard that it was Srila Prabhupad's desire to have Bhagavad Gita translated into Arabic, so he began that service immediately. A couple of years later, he met Srila Prabhupada personally in Vrindavan during the opening of the Krishna Balaram Temple in 1975.

"I couldn't believe Prabhupada wanted to meet me," he said. "The effulgence coming from him made me speechless. I had no way to converse with him. I was completely awestruck."

"Why are you sitting so far away?" Prabhupada asked him when he entered his room for darshan. "Come closer. Sit next to me." When Ravanari prabhu saw that Srila Prabhupada had a copy of his translation in his hands, he was overwhelmed.

"Read me the translations," Prabhupada asked. "But Prabhupada, it is in Arabic," he responded. According to Ravanari Prabhu, Srila Prabhupad then began to recite the entire Arabic alphabet and started to read some of his translation work. Ravanari prabhu spent the entire morning in Prabhupada's quarters reading out loud his translations while he listened attentively.

At the conclusion of the reading, Prabhupada announced, "Print it. Learn how to transliterate the Sanskrit verses as well. Print it as soon as possible".

After this time, he ran a preaching center in Beirut, "in the middle of a military zone" where he was tortured and imprisoned along with Tribhuvanath Prabhu (Ireland,) Omkar Prabhu (Mexico,) and Padmapani Prabhu (Canada.) They were not fed for weeks and almost starved to death in a small cell.



Ravanari Prabhu in Mayapur

"The soldiers beat me only because they considered me a local and suspected me to be the leader of a spy mission," he explained. "They kicked my head with their boots on and beat their guns into my skull. There was blood coming out of my eyes."

Later, while translating Prabhupada's books in Cairo, his only son, Shyamasundar, contracted meningitis and left this world at the age of 3.

“Somehow I had previously been inspired to bring him to Mayapur at a very young age. He went on parikram with me, took prasadam, and got a lot of blessings.” After this, he moved to Canada and spent his time translating every book of Srila Prabhupada into Arabic.

“I took seasonal jobs. I’d work for a few months at a time and then live off that money. I sat and translated for months and then I’d get work again for another few months,” he explained.

Ravanari Prabhu currently maintains a website where all of his Arabic translations of Srila Prabhupada’s books and lectures may be accessed: www.ravanari.com. He now spends most of his time in Mayapur.

BRC Welcomes New Staff Member

Pushti Devi Devi Dasi (Papiya Chatterjee) joined the BRC in May. She is in charge of our new publication department and is also part of the Development team.

Pushti joined Iskcon in 1987. She served in Sri Sri Radha Govinda’s kitchen at the Kolkata temple later becoming the personal assistant of the temple president. Her service included organizing membership, special event planning, maintaining correspondence and the temple’s large member database.

She lived for many years at New Dwarka in Los Angeles where she received further experience in ISKCON management.

“I’m very excited about our new publications department and assisting with development,” Pushti says. “I look forward to learning new skills to add to my experience.”

Pushti is a valuable asset to the BRC and we are glad to have her as part of team.

BRC Visits Son of Sundarananda Vidya Vinode

Recently, Bharati Roy, BRC Librarian and Field Archivist, met with Binodananda Das, son of Sundarananda Vidya Vinode, in his ancestral home in Kolkata. Sundarananda Vidya Vinode was the main editor and literary assistant for Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati during the early days of the Gaudiya Math.

The crest jewel of the library’s collection, the personal library of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, was maintained by Binodananda’s family before being obtained by the BRC.

The purpose of BRC Mission Manuscript Mission’s visit there was to present framed photographs of his father found in the course of their research. He was pleased as he had not seen them previously.

How You Can Get Involved

The Bhaktivedanta Research Library works through the generosity of donors from around the world. Unlike traditional ISKCON temples, we receive support from international donors who allow us to continue the unique mission of the Library. Besides the BRC’s regular operating costs, we have a number of capital projects currently awaiting funding. Please contact us at brc.mahalaksmi@gmail.com if you would like to help.

Library Computer Upgrade: The current computers used at the Library are all more than seven years old. We would like to upgrade them all and install our own dedicated server for uploading scans of rare books and materials to the website. It is part of the Libraries mission to make these important resources easily and freely available both devotees and the academic world – Indian Rupees 3,00,000 (approx \$ US 4500)

Library Expansion: Our ever expanding catalogue of books and manuscripts has created an urgent need to expand to another floor of our BRC building. Creating an archival quality library facility requires renovations that include custom shelving, furniture and air conditioning – Indian Rupees 7,00,000 (approx \$ US 10,500)

Office Space Renovation: We have recently purchased two flats on the ground floor and plan on converting one into a critically needed Communications and Development office to continue to expand the libraries exposure and acquisitions – Indian Rupees 3,00,000 (approx \$ US 4500)

Thanking Our Latest Donors

MVT, 1,50,000.00 per year for 3 yrs,(1st installment)

Parama Karuna das, Australia –Rps. 25,000.00

Warren Wright, USA – \$108.00

Krsna Kirtan das – Seattle – \$2,500.00

Vraja Narayan Das, Balaram desh – Rps. 1,00,000.00

Ramesvara das, New York, – \$500.00

Satya dasi, Australia – A\$180.00

Govinda Mohini dasi, Sydney – A\$360.00

Jayapataka Swami, Rps. 1,50,000.00

Smita Krsna Swami, E 2,000.00

Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International, \$2,500.00

Bhakti Charu Swami, Rps.10,000 per month

Mahavishnupriya dasi, USA, \$116.00