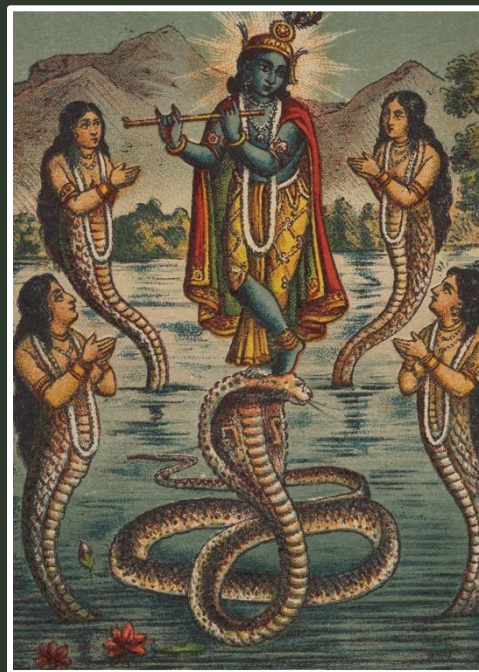




From Dormant Donation to Digital Discovery: A Case Study in AI-Assisted Access for South Asian Cultural Heritage

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Metadata Librarian





Bringing a Century-Old Collection to Life

- Collection date: 1903
- 35 lithographs
- 3 manuscripts
- AI application with Bengali-language



The Internship

- LIS 690 semester-long internship, 10 hrs/week hands-on
- Supervisor: Metadata Librarian
- Focus: metadata remediation for South/Southeast Asia digital collections
- Connected to this project through our South Asia Studies Librarian





Building the Metadata

- Digitized a 2-page printed inventory into a structured Google Sheet
- Standardized fields: ID, title, subject headings, etc.
- Subject headings drawn from FAST (Hindu mythology / Hindu mythology in art)
- Matched exact deity names to controlled vocabulary where possible

Metadata Example

Title

RadhaKrishna

Alternative Title

রীষীরাধাকৃষ্ণ

Creator

Basu, Atul K.

Contributor

Bemis, W. E.

Date

ca. 1903

Medium

lithography

Description

Title assigned by cataloger.

Subject

Hindu mythology

Hindu mythology in art

Krishna (Hindu deity)

Extent (Pages, Duration, Dimensions)

9 7/8 X 8 1/4

Identifier

2010_102_36_0001

Is Part Of

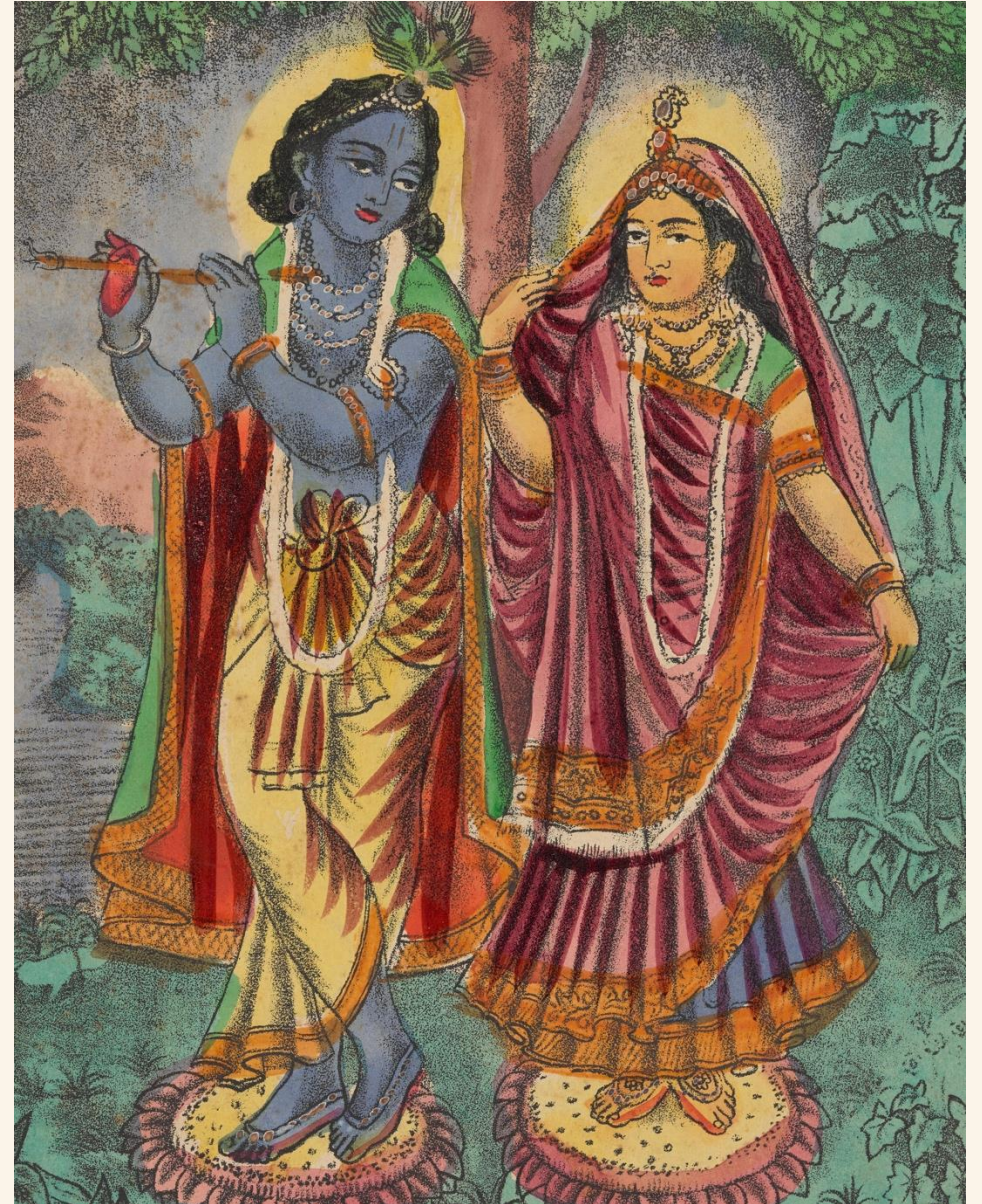
Asia Collection/South Asia Collection/Hindu gods & goddesses as traditionally known in Bengal

Source

https://uhawaii-manoa.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01UHAWAIL_MANOA/1j16209/alma9921564084605682

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Testing AI for Transcription

- Compared two AI tools for Bengali transcription, 4 scans per session to limit hallucination risk
- ChatGPT: inconsistent, letter-by-letter accuracy issues
- Gemini 3 Pro: strong results—only 1 of 29 images needed manual transcription





Limitations

- Tested Bengali script only—generalization to other non-Roman scripts unverified
- Handwritten manuscripts were not evaluated
- Untested on free-tier AI tools
- Limited project scope (38 items)
- Omeka lacks built-in OCR capability—a workaround was implemented

OCR Workaround Example

2.

Indian females that up to the present time no outsider is allowed to see the face of a newly born babe and if, in particular cases, it is allowed they keep many talismans, amulets and charms round about the baby.

MANSHA. Goddess of snakes. She is the wife of Jarooth Karoo~~the~~ Rishi, ~~who~~ ^{he} took a vow to lead a life of celibacy and with the object to have nothing to do with wordly and domestic affairs, he left home to be an ascetic. While crossing a river he found the current so strong that even a piece of straw broke into pieces. He thought of waiting till the tide ebbed down. While sitting under a tree a divine inspiration from the gods and goddesses told him that unless he married the souls of his forefathers and his own ~~included therein~~ ^{as well} would find no salvation and would remain for ever in Purgatory. This made him ^{he} return and married Monsha Devi - one of the sisters of Bashokee - the thousand-headed serpent on whose shoulder rests Mother Earth.

Just at the commencement of the rainy season the worship of the snake deity is held every year. In a place like Bengal infested with snakes, some of which are so venomous that death takes place within a few minutes after their bite, the law makers of old directed the worship of the deity. In some villages the snake charmers are requisitioned from distant places ~~who~~ ^{or they} catch snakes found in the house. Some of these charmers are very skilful, for they pretend to be bitten by the reptiles without any effect. This they do, to sell the special charms they hold a stock of. They are either inoculated with the poison or what is nearer truth, the poison glands have been previously removed from the snakes, when they bite. ^{during day} The puja (or worship) ~~is made, when~~ no cooked food should be taken by any member of the house.

=== PAGE 2 ===
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Lessons Learned

- First use of AI transcription for foreign-script metadata in our library
- Speeds expert work—doesn't replace expert review
- Untested on free-tier AI tools
- Allows discovery using Bengali or English





AI as a Tool for Discovery, Not Replacement

- Extended human expertise—did not replace it
- Unlocked non-Latin script transcription at scale
- Student experience: metadata and library-wide collaboration in practice
- A model for future special collections work

Mahalo Nui Loa

For more information, please reach out to the project leaders:

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