

Conversation with Vedic Astronomer

BY: MAYESVARA DASA

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In this paper we will present further evidence for our argument that a clear conception of Bhu-mandala had not been established by the time of Srila Prabhupada's departure in November in 1977; and that in the absence of a clear conception of Bhu-mandala, Srila Prabhupada had simply spoken of the Earth in the conventional sense as a globe floating in space (and not as the *Srimad Bhagavatam* actually describes it—a *vast circular plane*).

In a previous paper we presented the argument that the Earth of *Srimad Bhagavatam* (Bhu-mandala) is not described by Sukadeva Goswami as a globe in space, but rather as a great circular plane that is held by Ananta-sesha. The paper can be [found here](#).

In a follow-up paper we attempted an explanation of why Srila Prabhupada referred to the Earth as a globe in space, when *Srimad Bhagavatam* clearly presents a very different conception. The paper can be [found here](#).

In this paper we will look at the *Conversation with Vedic Astronomer* (April 30, 1977, Bombay) with the hope to further substantiate the claim that Srila Prabhupada had been speaking about the Earth as a globe in space merely in the conventional sense, and not as the *Srimad Bhagavatam* actually describes it. As the conversation with the Vedic astronomer unfolds, it is apparent that no clear concept or visualization of Bhu-mandala had been established at this point (what to speak of discussing the *Srimad Bhagavatam*'s concept of the Earth in relation to the modern idea). The disparity between these two world-views was only later raised as an issue in the Discussion on Bhu-mandala (July 2-5, 1977, Vrindavana). We will look at these discussions in a later paper.

Sometime after finishing his translation to the fifth canto in 1975, Srila Prabhupada developed the idea of presenting the Vedic cosmos at a planetarium in Mayapur in India. During a morning walk conversation with Dr Patel on November 7 1975, Srila Prabhupada mentions the idea of having an exhibition to depict the planets according to *Srimad Bhagavatam*'s description.

Prabhupada: But the idea was that in our big temple I wanted to display.

Bhagavata: Oh. You didn't want a separate building.

Prabhupada: No. We wanted to display where is...the Vaikuntha planet, where is the Goloka planet, where is this material world—in this way...So I think we shall have, according to our original plan, the temple, and in that temple we shall display all these dolls: "Here is Vaikunthaloka, here is this loka, this loka, this loka."

(*Morning Walk, November 7 1975, Bombay*)

Again, a few months later:

Prabhupada: ...from the Bhagavatam. So this should be mentioned. It is not only a temple, but a planetarium according to Bhagavatam, where which planet is situated, where is Vaikunthaloka, where is Goloka Vrndavana, where is Mahar... Devotees: Wow!

Tamala Krishna: You want a real planetarium just like in the West.

Jayapataka: That's what I told them, Prabhupada...

Prabhupada: Yes.

Jayapataka: ...that this is not a temple; this is like a big cultural exposition, museum, planetarium.

Prabhupada: Yes.

(*Morning Walk, Feb 9, 1976, Mayapur*)

Again:

Devotee (4): Temple and planetarium.

Prabhupada: Yes.

Devotee (4): "World's largest planetarium and Temple of Understanding."

Prabhupada: No "Understanding" simply Vedic "Temple of Vedic Planetarium," That's all. We shall show the Vedic conception of planetary system within this material world and above the material world. [break] We are going to exhibit the Vedic culture throughout the whole world, and they'll come here.

Jayapataka: The whole world will be coming here to...

Prabhupada: Yes.

Jayapataka: ...visit.

Prabhupada: Just like they come to see the Taj Mahal...

Hridayananda: Yes.

Prabhupada: ...the architectural culture, they'll come to see the civilization culture, the philosophical culture, the religious culture by practical demonstration with dolls and other things.

Jayapataka: And we'll be advertising that all over the world.

Prabhupada: Yes.

Hridayananda: It is a perfect plan.

Prabhupada: Yes.

Jayapataka: There can be a model of that temple in every temple all over the world.

Prabhupada: Yes.

Jayapataka: So then people can... Then advertising, "Come here."

Prabhupada: Oh, yes. Actually it will be an unique thing in the world. There is no such thing all over the world. That we shall do. And not only simply showing museum, but educating people to that idea.

Hridayananda: Preaching.

Prabhupada: Right. With factual knowledge, books, not fictitious. (end)

(Morning Walk, February 27 1976, Mayapur)

The excitement and revolutionary spirit is also clearly discernible:

Satsvarupa: Srila Prabhupada, are the planets shaped liked balls or more like plates? Because it's, it's hard to understand, 'cause they're called dvipas, "islands." Their roundness is the roundness of a plate or like a ball?

Prabhupada: Which one?

Satsvarupa: The earth planet?

Prabhupada: If it is like a tree, then these things can be as dvipa, island.

Tamala Krishna: Wow. You know...

Prabhupada: Eh?

Tamala Krishna: The scientists are getting smashed to bits by your statements, Srila Prabhupada. This destroys their whole theory. Orbs, round spheres. I think that this Mayapura building, we must build a big planetarium in it.

Prabhupada: Yes. That, that I am going to do, Vedic planetarium.

Tamala Krishna: Oh, boy. You're going to bring a lot of.... A lot of scientists will come here just to dispute this.

Prabhupada: Yes.

Pushta Krishna: Wonderful attraction.

Prabhupada: World people will come to see the way the planetary systems...

Tamala Krishna: We should advertise it very widely that this is the actual, factual explanation of the universe.

Prabhupada: This will be automatically advertised. As soon as the temple is finished, people will come like anything.

Hari-sauri: They're going to need somebody to...

Prabhupada: The thing is, on principle, we shall only go against them.

Hamsaduta: Contrary.

Prabhupada: On principle. Whatever they say "Yes," we say "No." (laughter)
(Morning Walk, March 18 1976, Mayapur)

We will discuss more about the above discussion in the next paper as it contains many interesting points. It is certainly significant that in response to Satsvarupa Goswami's question about the shape of the Earth—*whether it is round like a plate or round like a ball*—Srila Prabhupada answers by saying 'these things can be as dwipa,' meaning Earth is round like a dwipa (island), not round like a ball. Tamala Krishna Goswami's reply displays quick and sharp comprehension of the implications of Prabhupada's answer for the globe concept: "The scientists are getting smashed to bits by your statements, Srila Prabhupada. *This destroys their whole theory. Orbs, round spheres.*" Our Earth, in fact, is described by Sukadeva Goswami as being situated on the first *dwipa* or island of Bhu-mandala called Jambudwipa; it is not described as a planet floating in space, but just a small part of the greater Earth that surrounds us in all directions. Despite Srila Prabhupada's statement above, there appears to be no major discussion on the issue until the Bhu-mandala discussions in July 1977. Significantly, during these discussions, it is Tamala Krishna Goswami who again presents the disparity between the two world-views to Srila Prabhupada:

Tamala Krishna: Look at the earth. Now, this is a real question that we still have to answer. They picture the earth round, and we say, no. Bhu-mandala is like a lotus, like this, and the earth is only one part of one island in Bhu-mandala, and it's not, you know, it's not round(?). It doesn't look like that. And all the pictures they take of the earth when they go up in their satellites show round. And we're going to tell them that it's not...

Prabhupada: So are you thinking on this?

Bhakti-prema: In the Srimad-Bhagavatam... According to Srimad-Bhagavatam, it is (indistinct).

Prabhupada: Find out from our side, according to Bhagavatam.

(*Bhu-mandala Diagram Discussion, July 2 1977, Vrindavana*)

These *Discussions on Bhu-mandala* took place in early July 1977 after the map of Bhu-mandala along with a detail of Jambudwipa had finally been drafted. These maps had been some time in the making. After Srila Prabhupada's initial announcement to depict the Vedic cosmos within the planetarium, it had become necessary to create some kind of map or image to show what the whole thing looked like. Anyone who has read through the fifth canto will appreciate how difficult it is to conceive of how the Bhu-mandala looks, or what the description even means. It seems Srila Prabhupada was unable to create these images or maps himself and requested one of his disciples to locate a Vedic astronomer that could help create the necessary images. Tamala Krishna Goswami relates the history as follows:

For some time, Sri Patit Uddharan had been traveling throughout India at Srila Prabhupada's request in search of a scholar who would be able to explain more clearly the description of the universe as given in the Fifth Canto of Srimad-Bhagavatam. Srila Prabhupada said that he himself had tried to make it as clear as possible, but still he was not satisfied. He wanted a diagram of a working model to include in the Mayapur planetarium. In Madras, Patit had met Sri Agnihotram Ramanuja Tatachariar and brought him all the way to Bombay, claiming he was the most qualified. (TKG's Diary: Prabhupada's Final Days, May 1, 1977)

Before the meeting, Tamala Krishna Goswami explained to some disciples:

Prabhupada: One very big pandita is coming. He'll help us about the Sanskrit language, how to form this...

Tamala Krishna: Planetarium.

Prabhupada: ...planetarium.

Tamala Krishna: One big pandita has been contacted, and he's very surrendered to Prabhupada. He wants to help Prabhupada and our movement to understand the meaning of the shastras in regard to the layout of the universe, so that the planetary systems can be done in our planetarium."

(*Room Conversation, March 2-3 1977, Mayapur*)

Notice the language here: Tamala Krishna Goswami is speaking in front of Srila Prabhupada and he says: "One big pandita has been contacted, and he's very surrendered to Prabhupada. He wants to help Prabhupada and our movement to understand the meaning of the shastras in regard to the layout of the universe, so that the planetary systems can be done in our planetarium." Tamala Krishna Goswami does not say here that the pandita is coming to learn from Srila Prabhupada about the layout of the universe; rather, he says the pandita "*wants to help Prabhupada and our movement understand the meaning of the shastras in regards to the layout of the universe*". Of course, the pandita like everyone else in the world had everything to learn from Srila Prabhupada about devotion to Krishna, but on this particular aspect of Vedic cosmology, Srila Prabhupada required some technical information with which he himself was not familiar. Why otherwise would Srila Prabhupada silently assent to such a statement from Tamala Krishna Goswami? Naturally because Tamala Krishna Goswami is just informing the other devotees of what Srila Prabhupada obviously required from the Vedic astronomer.

It may be objected that Srila Prabhupada had himself translated the fifth canto and had consulted the commentaries of the previous acharyas, so obviously he was aware of what was described, as well as being made aware of the understanding of the disciplic succession. We have discussed the question at length in the previous paper. It appears from Srila Prabhupada's own statements (see below) that there was some difficulty to visualize what Sukadeva Goswami was describing. We have Srila Prabhupada's own words regarding his translation of the Fifth Canto:

Prabhupada: And it was not possible for me to digest. (laughs) Somebody else helped me to... I am a layman. I do not know.

Tamala Krishna: How did you write it?

Prabhupada: That somebody, Krishna, helped me. That He manufactured...When I was writing, I was praying Krishna that "I do not actually accommodate all this knowledge. Please help me." Yes. That's all right.

(*Room Conversation, June 18, 1977, Vrindavana*)

We also have Srila Prabhupada's statement to Paramahamsa dasa during a discussion about the fifth canto's cosmology. The following extract is from *The Great Transcendental Adventure* by Kurma dasa:

"Later in his room, Srila Prabhupada discussed more about Vedic cosmology with Paramahamsa. The different planetary orbits, Srila Prabhupada said, were all independent; the so-called law of gravity was not mentioned as such in the Vedic literature. Prabhupada answered a few more of Paramahamsa's questions about the current work on Srimad Bhagavatam, Fifth Canto, and then fell silent. "Actually," he added, after a few minutes, "I am not giving any more information -- simply what is there." Prabhupada was frank. "I am not an astronomer, so I may not understand all the details. Those details are given in another part of the Vedas. Sukadeva Gosvami is giving some basic summary ideas of the universal operation. The stress," Prabhupada concluded, "is on devotion, not geography."

(*The Great Transcendental Adventure, Ten Days in Perth, 1975, by Kurma das*)

Again, this is an important statement from Srila Prabhupada in regards to his acquaintance with the details of the fifth canto cosmology: "I am not an astronomer, so I may not understand all the details."

[Incidentally, I wrote the following question to Amogha dasa, a disciple of Srila Prabhupada who was present in the room at the time:

Mayesvara dasa: I was just hoping you if you could add any more detail to this. I've been doing some research on the fifth canto cosmology...It's interesting that Prabhupada said he didn't know all the details, but some devotees may not accept this.

Amogha dasa: Haribol that's about it! Ys Amogha]

Although Srila Prabhupada was the initiator of the great project to present the Vedic cosmology at the Mayapur Temple of Vedic Planetarium, as we can see from the above statements he did not present himself as an authority on the subject; in fact it was an area of the transcendental science that (from the above statements) seemed somewhat unfamiliar to him. Srila Prabhupada again mentioned to the Vedic astronomer:

Prabhupada: I have tried to translate it as far as possible, but I am not satisfied.
(Conversation with India Astronomer, April 30, 1977, Bombay)

Why was Srila Prabhupada not satisfied? It appears that although Srila Prabhupada managed to translate the fifth canto, a complete understanding of how the whole thing looked remained somewhat problematic to both Srila Prabhupada and those disciples he had engaged to study the fifth canto. In the words of Tamala Krishna Goswami spoken in July 1977 (just a few months before Srila Prabhupada's departure) the fifth canto was a mystery to everyone:

Tamala Krishna Goswami: So I think that Svarupa Damodara will be helped by these drawings when the men come. 'Cause he said that *even though they are scientists, they could not understand this volume. It's been a mystery practically.* These drawings, one by one, should be able to help in the creation of that planetarium.

Prabhupada: Thank you very much. Hare Krishna.
(Bhu-mandala Diagram Discussion, July 2, 1977, Vrindavana)

That the Bhu-mandala was practically a dead concept in India was proven by the fact that despite Srila Prabhupada sending one of his disciples around India to locate a Vedic astronomer who could draw a map of Bhu-mandala, not one could be found who could depict the thing (at least not to Srila Prabhupada's satisfaction as the following conversation with the Vedic astronomer illustrates):

Prabhupada: So we are presenting this planetarium...
Indian Astronomer: Bhagavata, yes?
Prabhupada: From Bhagavatam.
Indian Astronomer: Yes, yes.
Prabhupada: In the Fifth Canto there is description of the planetary system.
Indian Astronomer: Yes, yes.
Prabhupada: So we want a diagram.
Indian Astronomer: Yes, yes.
Prabhupada: So kindly help us...
Prabhupada: Hare Krishna. Now find out that Fifth Canto. So this planetary system is hanging.
Indian Astronomer: Yes.
Prabhupada: Irdhva-mulam adhah-sakham [Bg. 15.1]. Same thing is explained in the Srimad-Bhagavatam. Now, how it is hanging and where are different situation of the planets and plateaus and hills and..., so as far as the book is concerned, kindly make a diagram so that we shall execute.
Prabhupada: *Immediately we want the diagram how to fix it up so that people can see, "This is the situation." So you make this diagram.*
Indian Astronomer: It is first attempt to give in picture the ideas of Bhagavatam.
Prabhupada: Yes. So we... We are... We have got very good scheme so that people from the world will come to see the Vedic idea of planetary system. This is the ambition. So you kindly help us.

Let us be conscious here of what Srila Prabhupada requires. He is asking the Vedic astronomer to produce a visual representation of the Vedic cosmos so that it can be depicted in a 3 dimensional form within the main dome of the TOVP. Such an image had never been produced before (at least not in the modern world). No one in India or anywhere in the modern world had any idea what the universal form looked like. As the

astronomer says 'it is the first attempt to give in pictures the idea of Bhagavatam.' So it is not a fault on Srila Prabhupada's part that he didn't know what the Bhu-mandala looked like. Here we can garner a sense of Srila Prabhupada's eagerness to revive this idea of Vedic cosmology and present it to the modern world, but there is no sense that Srila Prabhupada himself actually knows what it all looks like. Since neither Srila Prabhupada nor his disciples were able to produce an image at this point, the arrangement of the Bhu-mandala had obviously been unclear; otherwise why would Srila Prabhupada request of the astronomer: "*Immediately we want the diagram how to fix it up so that people can see, "This is the situation."*"

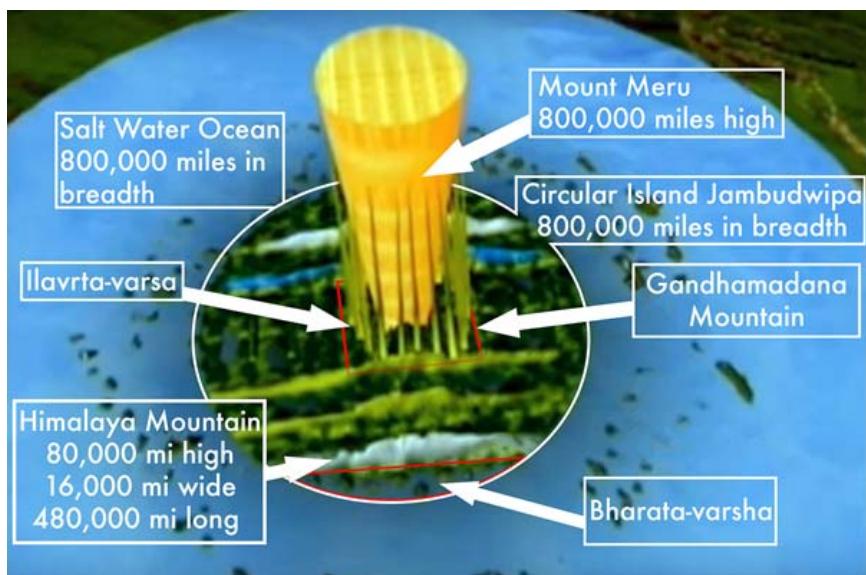
Srila Prabhupada even refers to the whereabouts of the different hills etc: "where are different situation of the planets and plateaus and hills and..., so as far as the book is concerned, kindly make a diagram so that we shall execute". The hills in question are actually the great mountains on Bhu-mandala like Meru, Manasottara, and Lokaloka that are hundreds of thousands of miles high and wide. Srila Prabhupada was obviously unclear about the whereabouts of these fantastic features of Bhu-mandala and sometimes just described them as features of other planets. If we look, for example, at one of the first translations and purports to the fifth canto, Srila Prabhupada states that:

"Another significant point is that there is a planet covered mostly by great mountains, one of which is Gandhamadana Hill."
(Purport SB 5.1.8)

Gandhamadana hill, however, is not on another planet. It is located on another part of this Earth. The Earth being described here, is not the so-called Earth globe, but rather the first island on the vast circular plane (Bhu-mandala). Gandhamadana Mountain is situated on the eastern side of Ilavrta-varsha on the mainland of Jambudwipa:

"In the same way, west and east of Ilavrta-varsha are two great mountains named Malyavan and Gandhamadana respectively. These two mountains, which are 2,000 yojanas [16,000 miles] high, extend as far as Nila Mountain in the north and Nishadha in the south. They indicate the borders of Ilavrta-varsha and also the varshas known as Ketumala and Bhadrshva." (SB 5.16.10)

The image below shows the location of Gandhamadana Mountain at the eastern side of Ilavrta-varsha. Bharata-varsha is further to the south:



Likewise, the great Himalaya Mountain described in *Srimad Bhagavatam* is actually further north along the Earth plane from our mountain of the same name in India. Although India is traditionally identified with Bharata-varsha, Bharata-varsha is actually a much greater region. Indeed the whole of our known Earth area is just one small part of Bharata-varsha. The great Himalaya Mountain forms the northern border of Bharata-varsha and is 480,000 miles across which gives us some indication of the over-all size of the Bharata-varsha region.

It is easy for me to say this now because by the efforts of Srila Prabhupada's disciples we have at least a few maps and images of Bhu-mandala that help make things apparent. Unfortunately, we still have nothing like the sophisticated images and animations that we should have by this point. It is very unfortunate that despite pumping untold millions into the TOVP building, we still do not have one single image or video animation that accurately displays the full Bhu-mandala landscape. The present TOVP animation of the Vedic cosmos depicts the great islands, oceans, and mountains of Bhu-mandala as simply ring-shaped circles in the void of space, and completely misrepresents the original idea. The amount of money that it would take to make one decent animated depiction of Bhu-mandala is comparable to a grain of sand in the Sahara of money that it will cost to make the building itself. I more than anyone fully appreciate the service of all the devotees involved to make the TOVP the most amazing building in the world, but let us also try to get our priorities right. All the plans are now well underway for a beautiful Planetarium Temple involving the dedicated work of thousands of devotees and many other workers involved in the project; but how many people are involved in the research that will be necessary to establish the *Srimad Bhagavatam*'s version of cosmic reality?

Do those at the TOVP even understand Bhu-mandala? As yet, there seems to be no indication from the TOVP representatives that they have accepted Sukadeva Goswami's description that our Earth area (in Bharata-varsha) is part of Bhu-mandala's *circular plane*, and not a *round planet floating in space*. That explains why we don't have any suitable images or animation to depict the Bhu-mandala, because as yet, no one has grasped that this mind-blowing description of a greater Earth is an actual description of reality. I don't wish to sound always negative about this great project which involves the devoted service and contributions of so many devotees; I'm just requesting that the universe is presented as it is described, and that we enter the new Earth paradigm into which it leads us.

What to speak of having a 3 dimensional model or animation of Bhu-mandala, Srila Prabhupada did not even see a simple map of Bhu-mandala until the end of June 1977; and so the conceptualization of what was being described as a vast Earth plane was an obvious difficulty. In all of his *Srimad Bhagavatam* translations and purports, Srila Prabhupada invariably translated the areas of Bhu-mandala as other planets, when they are, in fact, just part of one vast Earth area that is divided into seven *dwipas* (islands) and *varshas* (regions within the *dwipas*). Srila Prabhupada's concept of 'Earthly planets' actually refers to the *sapta-dwipa*—the seven islands of the Bhu-mandala that span for over 200 million miles and form the inhabited area of the Earth. They are not planets as we understand them, but simply other areas of the Earth's massive plane. Although Srila Prabhupada spoke of 'the Earthly planetary systems,' 'the lower planetary systems', and 'the hellish planetary systems', and despite their conjuring up images of globe-like planets floating in dark space, they are actually just areas that either upon the surface of the Earth, or areas within its huge depths.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Srila Prabhupada also spoke of Bharata-varsha (where our Earth is situated) in the conventional language of 'planet.'

"This earth planet is known as Bharata, or Bharata-varsha." (*SB 1.12.20 Purport*)

In order to make *Srimad Bhagavatam* somewhat intelligible to the modern reader, Srila Prabhupada in his purport is explaining that Bharata-varsha refers to our known Earth. Srila Prabhupada refers to our known Earth as 'this Earth planet' for the simple reason that even Srila Prabhupada at this point did not have a clear idea of Bharata-varsha's

connection to the rest of Bhu-mandala, and hence did not call into question the modern conception of the Earth as a planet floating in space. On closer inspection, however, Sukadeva Goswami's description of Bharata-varsha location on the southern side of Jambudwipa (the central island of the great Earth circle) has no correlation whatsoever with the modern idea that we are on an 'Earth planet' floating in space. Srila Prabhupada was made aware of this to some degree in the Bhu-mandala discussions, but the issue was never resolved. Srila Prabhupada entered samadhi in November 1977, and the question of the Earth remained unanswered.

The thrust of Srila Prabhupada's preaching on cosmology was to instill faith that there is other intelligent life and civilizations throughout the universe. Despite this extraordinary preaching achievement, the details of where these civilizations/other worlds are located in the Vedic cosmos were not entirely familiar to Srila Prabhupada who did not even have a map of the Vedic cosmos to work from. Srila Prabhupada simply used the default word 'planets' to describe places both upon and within the core of the great Earth itself. In the absence of a clear conception of Bhu-mandala, Srila Prabhupada nevertheless impressed upon his listeners that there are other inhabited realms throughout the universe, including other Earth-like worlds. Mind-blowing as this concept is, it is even more stupefying to learn that these other Earth worlds are actually just part of a greater Earth plane that surrounds our known world in all directions. In other words, despite what government, education, and media have presented to the people of the world regarding the shape and size of the Earth, and despite having so-called images of an Earth globe from outer-space, the *Srimad Bhagavatam* presents a very description of the Earth's shape and size—a description that defies our deeply held beliefs about the so-called Earth planet, and which will ultimately force the world-wide devotee community to call into question everything that secular forces have conditioned us to accept as true and factual regarding the nature of the Earth. This of course has wide-ranging implications in regards to not only understanding the demoniac nature and purpose of those same secular forces, but also how to stop these forces by fearlessly preaching the message of *Srimad Bhagavatam*. We have made the point in previous articles that the purpose of the TOVP is not simply to display a model of Bhu-mandala, but more importantly, to preach a concept of reality that is in accordance with the idea depicted. As Srila Prabhupada says in the conversation below: "not only simply showing museum, but educating people to that idea."

Prabhupada: ...We shall show the Vedic conception of planetary system within this material world and above the material world. [break] We are going to exhibit the Vedic culture throughout the whole world, and they'll come here...

Jayapataka: There can be a model of that temple in every temple all over the world.

Prabhupada: Yes.

Jayapataka: So then people can... Then advertising, "Come here."

Prabhupada: Oh, yes. Actually it will be an unique thing in the world. There is no such thing all over the world. That we shall do. And not only simply showing museum, but educating people to that idea.

(Morning Walk, Feb 27, 1976, Mayapur)

Srila Prabhupada makes the point here that the purpose of the TOVP is 'not only simply showing museum' but '*educating people to that idea*'. Srila Prabhupada is referring to the idea of the universe as it is described by Sukadeva Goswami! Since Sukadeva Goswami describes Bharata-varsha's location as being on the plane of Bhu-mandala, then the idea that we live on a globe floating in space is obviously false. The cause and nature of the falsity must therefore be pointed out and argued—thus '*educating people to that idea*'. This means taking on the official version of the Earth as propagated by governments and science through-out the world. This will require a great endeavor on the part of many devotees to not only expose the pseudo-science and propaganda supporting this false construct of reality, but also to manifest the spiritual science that proves the *Srimad Bhagavatam*'s version. The concept of Bhu-mandala is not a quaint but hopelessly ridiculous idea from ancient India. It is a weapon of war against the illusions created by scientism. Our concern is that the preaching from the TOVP (when it eventually opens) will be the result of a political decision (one that fears to rock the boat concerning the

current belief that the Earth is a globe in space) rather than the result of a theological decision (one that strictly adheres to the description of the Earth in *Srimad Bhagavatam*).

In the next section of the *Conversation with Astronomer*, Srila Prabhupada is emphatic that the images are prepared according to the description in *Srimad Bhagavatam*—not that it has to be acceptable to all (referring to Western astronomers and scientists).

Indian Astronomer: As far as possible, as our Lord moves, I am prepared to serve.

Prabhupada: So you sit down and take paper and make it and..., so that he can understand. You have already studied that.

Indian Astronomer: Several times.

Prabhupada: So that you can do immediately. You do. Can you make a rough sketch immediately?

Indian Astronomer: First (indistinct). Because after he came there I told him that we must prepare a diagram which is acceptable to all, acceptable to all.

Prabhupada: No, acceptable, the, I mean to say, Western astronomers, they...

Indian Astronomer: No, we... If you prefer *Bhagavatam* and if you give only *Bhagavatam*...

Prabhupada: Yes.

Indian Astronomer: ...whether Western accepts or not, that is not worthwhile.

Prabhupada: Eh?

Indian Astronomer: Whether Westerners or modern scientists accept or not, that is not worthwhile.

Prabhupada: No, we want do it according to *Bhagavatam*.

Indian Astronomer: That is what I mean.

We shall present quite a few statements in a later paper in which Srila Prabhupada reiterates, emphasizes, and insists on these same two points: (1) for his disciples to follow and present the exact description of the universe as it is described in *Srimad Bhagavatam*; (2) for his followers not to be concerned with the inevitable negative reactions of modern so-called science to the *Srimad Bhagavatam*'s conception. Srila Prabhupada's direction was just to depict the Vedic universe according to the description in shastra. This again is immensely important because, of course, there is no description of an Earth globe in the shastra; Bharata-varsha is otherwise described as being located on the surface of the vast Earth plane:

Prabhupada: What is the difficulty? The sastra is there. You have to make drawing according to sastra. That's all.

Indian Astronomer: You see, everything is separate author. Preparing diagram is separate author.

Prabhupada: Why separate au...? If you understand clearly, you can make it.

Indian Astronomer: No, no, not like Your Holiness... We'll be able to... We all will go, deeply penetrate in the ideas of scriptures, and find out the facts.

Prabhupada: At least you make some attempt. Let us see.

The conversation with the astronomer ended in disappointment due to the astronomer having firstly failed to bring an image of Bhu-mandala with him, nor being certain that he could produce such an image in the future. Srila Prabhupada explained to Tamala Krishna Goswami that the problem in locating an Vedic astronomer who could produce the image was that no one took the *Srimad Bhagavatam*'s description literally. Everyone considers the description to be imaginary:

Prabhupada: He has no clear idea.

Tamala Krishna: And what to do? How to get...?

Prabhupada: Krishna will help.

Tamala Krishna: Hm?

Prabhupada: Krishna will help. He has no idea.

Tamala Krishna: He says, "We never thought to read *Bhagavatam* as you are now talking. We have not read *Bhagavatam* like this yet, so I will have to begin to read

again as..." I mean, what... I'm only wondering what kind of talk Patita Uddharana must have had with him that he felt that this man was qualified.

Prabhupada: So how he'll make diagram? He has no idea.

Tamala Krishna: No, he doesn't. He never thought about it. No one reads the Bhagavatam as a scientific book, Srila Prabhupada. That's the point. Except for Your Divine Grace, they are thinking it's story, "It is stories."

Prabhupada: Yes, they do not believe.

Tamala Krishna: No. And therefore no one takes it seriously. Modern people don't take it seriously.

Prabhupada: There was a Gosai. He was reading Caitanya-caritamrita. So the description of the planetary system there is. He used to say to his audience, "Actually these things are not there. These are imaginary descriptions." He was such a fool. So the whole world has taken like that, "symbolic, imagination."

Tamala Krishna: And he was lecturing on Caitanya-caritamrita. I think you mentioned that one of your Godbrothers once said to you, "You really believe that there is such a place, Krishnaloka, Vaikunthaloka?" He was himself...

Prabhupada: Bon Maharaja did not believe. No... Nobody ever thought of it.

Tamala Krishna: You are the only representative, the lone representative of religion left on this planet, Srila Prabhupada.

(Conversation with Astronomer, April 30 1977, Bombay)

This is an important point to understand. Fantastic as it seems, the description of the Earth in *Srimad Bhagavatam* is to be accepted by the followers of Krishna as real—not metaphorical or mythological as some may wish to present. Even devotees fall victim to this way of thinking, and prefer to believe in the Earth globe concept, despite *Srimad Bhagavatam* presenting a very different description of reality.

The incident of creating maps for the Bhu-mandala is recorded in *Lilamrta* in the following way:

One of the topics which Srila Prabhupada dealt with during these days was the conception of a model universe for a Vedic planetarium. His disciple Ambarisha, great-grandson of Henry Ford, had pledged to donate for constructing a gorgeous museum-planetarium in a major city such as Detroit or Washington, D.C. Srila Prabhupada wanted to present the structure of the universe as it is presented in the Fifth Canto, but so far no one had been able to show how it could be done. The devotees who tried were often baffled in an attempt to reconcile the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*'s description with the conceptions of modern astronomy. In Bombay, they had brought a so-called Vedic astronomer before Prabhupada, but he had been unable to make even a simple diagram. Modern scientists give no credence to the *Bhagavatam*'s account describing the earth as Jambudvipa, an island in the middle of concentric oceans and islands. Nor do the scientists find mountains as tall as those described in the Vedic literature. Srila Prabhupada cautioned the devotees, however, not to be guided by their own Western prejudices but to try and understand the universe as described in the *Bhagavatam*.

And that was extremely difficult. Srila Prabhupada admitted, "When I wrote this, I thought it will not be possible for me unless somebody else helps me." "How did you write it?" Tamala Krishna asked, and Srila Prabhupada replied, "Krishna helped me. I don't know. [He laughed.] That somebody-Krishna-helped."

Inevitably the devotees asked, "But how will we explain it to the scientists?"

"We do not require to satisfy the scientists," Srila Prabhupada replied. "We have to describe according to sastra. If they can understand it, then they'll understand it. Otherwise, it is not our business to satisfy the so-called scientists. We are dealing with the real description."

Tamala Krishna suggested that the planetarium would spell the downfall of Western civilization.

"Yes," said Prabhupada, "I want to expose that they are cheating. Their only interest is to make money, and for this they cheat. If you can make this planetarium, it will be a grand success, triumphant."

(*Srila Prabhupada Lilamrta, Volume 6, Uniting Two Worlds, Return to Vrindavana, 1975-1977, SPL 52, I Have Done My Part*)

After the disappointment with the astronomer from south India, Srila Prabhupada again suggested to his disciples to advertise in newspapers for Vedic astronomers to help:

Prabhupada: So what to do? He has wasted so much money. He's not the proper man.

Tamala Krishna: No. Why not let us try to find out some man locally here in Bombay?

Prabhupada: Very difficult. You can try.

Tamala Krishna: I mean, there's just as good a chance he'll find him here as anywhere else. And it won't cost anything.

Prabhupada: "Astronomer knowing the planetary system," you can advertise.

"Expert astronomer who knows the planetary systems as described..."

Tamala Krishna: "...in Srimad-Bhagavatam."

Prabhupada: Hm.

Tamala Krishna: Yeah, we can advertise. Instead of having somebody going all over India.

(*Conversation with India Astronomer, April 30 1977, Bombay*)

Srila Prabhupada said that Krishna would help:

Prabhupada: Krishna will help.

Tamala Krishna: Hm?

Prabhupada: Krishna will help. He has no idea.

(*Conversation with India Astronomer, April 30 1977, Bombay*)

From the above conversation and other statements cited, it is obvious that Srila Prabhupada had some difficulty in conceptualizing the fifth canto's description of the universe and was thus requesting help to prepare maps that would depict the Vedic Universe—*hence our argument that in the absence of a clear conception of Bhu-mandala, it was only practical of Srila Prabhupada to have been speaking of the Earth in the conventional sense as a globe in space*. What other language or conception could he have used? Despite using this language, we can see nonetheless from many, many statements that Srila Prabhupada insisted on presenting the Bhu-mandala and the rest of the universe according to the description in the Bhagavatam. It was, in any case Srila Prabhupada's general principle to present *Srimad Bhagavatam* as it is:

"We are teaching Bhagavad-gita and *Srimad Bhagavatam* as it is spoken by the authorities. We don't add anything or subtract anything."

(*SB 1.2.6, Delhi, November 12 1973*)

Thus Srila Prabhupada requested his own disciples to "carefully study the details of the fifth canto and present a working model of the universe" (Letter from Srila Prabhupada to Svarupa Damodara dasa, April 27, 1976). Deciphering the fifth canto was basically an area of study that Srila Prabhupada handed over to his disciples:

"Srila Prabhupada then expressed his concern: "We must exactly follow the description of Bhagavatam. As we are going to spend many crores of rupees, and there will be those who will try to find fault in our presentation, 'Caesar's wife must be above suspicion.' I have explained whatever I could already in my books. Now my brain is no longer able to work properly. You young men can tax your brains to understand the Sanskrit and English descriptions and present them."

(*TKG's Diary: Prabhupada's Final Days, May 30 1977*)

If Srila Prabhupada had been confident in his understanding of the fifth canto then why would he say: "You young men can tax your brains to understand the Sanskrit and English descriptions and present them." Srila Prabhupada presents himself here as an exemplary authority by refusing to speculate on the subject of Vedic cosmology, and instead requesting his own younger disciples make a more in-depth study of the shastra in order to ascertain the truth of the matter.

In the summer of 1977, possibly realizing that his time was short, Srila Prabhupada gathered Tamala Krishna Goswami, Yashodanandana dasa, Bhakti-prema dasa, and Puskara dasa (the artist) in order to research the fifth canto and make a map of the Bhu-mandala, as well as for the upper part of the universe in preparation for the display of the universal form within the TOVP. Tamala Krishna Goswami wrote in one letter to Hamsaduta dasa:

"It may be interesting to know that one sannyasi here, Bhakti Prem Swami, who is a Sanskrit expert, as well and Yasodanandan Swami and myself are working under Srila Prabhupada's direction on chalking out the model for the planetarium."

(Tamal Krishna Goswami to Hamsaduta, Vrindavana, June 25 1977)

Tamala Krishna Goswami mentions the names and qualifications of some of these devotees in a letter to Ramesvara:

"The persons who were present at that meeting with Srila Prabhupada were not ordinary devotees. Bhakti Prem Maharaja is quite expert at Sanskrit, so much so that Srila Prabhupada feels confident that we do not have to look for a Sanskrit pandit for explaining how the planetarium should be arranged according to the Bhagavatam, now that we have found him. Dr. Svarupa Damodar is a scientist, and Srila Prabhupada has the greatest respect for his opinion. Yasodanandan Maharaja is an advanced sannyasi devotee, very knowledgeable in the philosophy. And I am simply a rascal. At least the opinions of the first three persons are valuable."

(Letter to Ramesvara, July 22 1977)

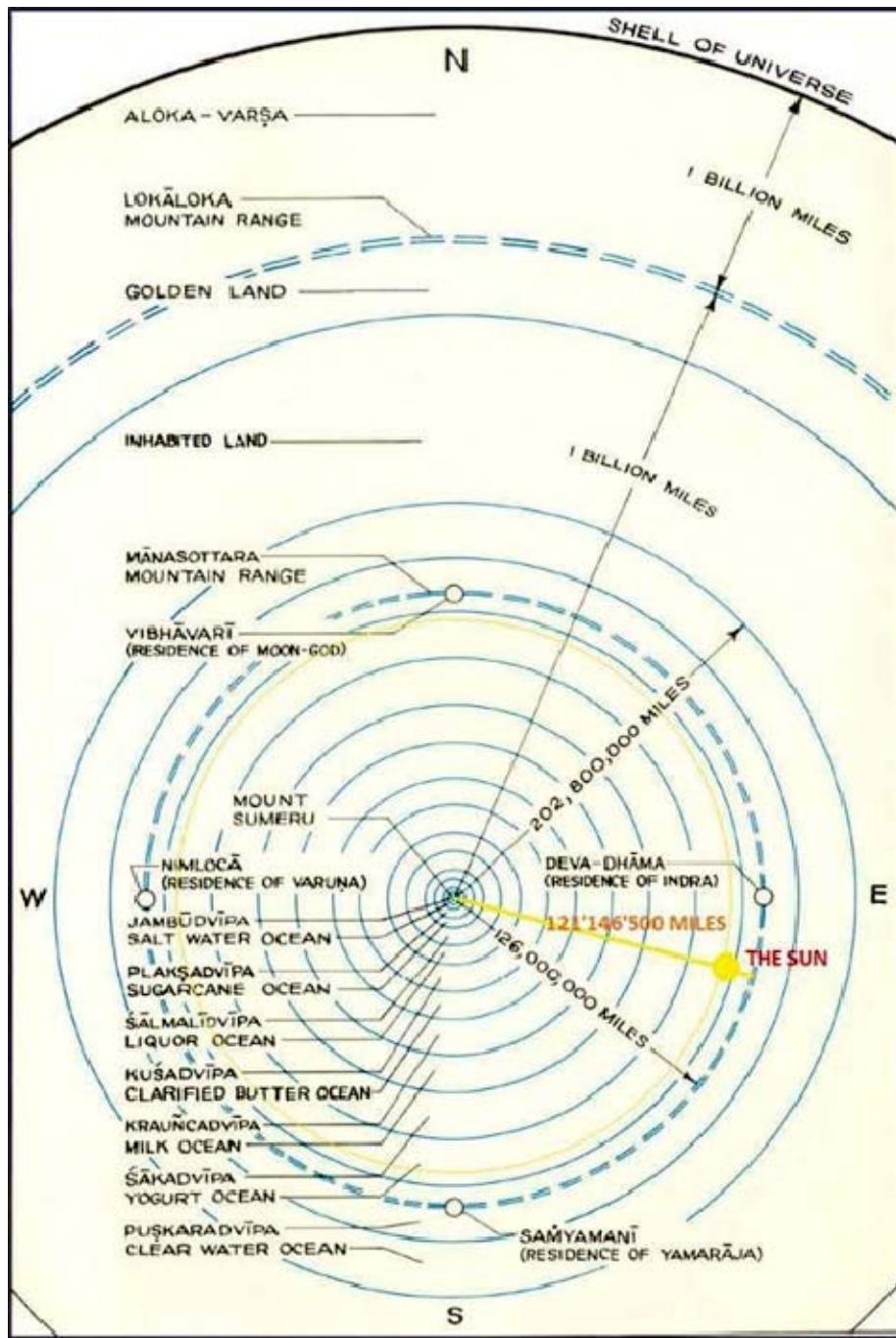
Hari-sauri recounts this period as follows:

"And during the summer of '77, Prabhupada had a lot of meetings with him and Tamala Krishna Maharaja to discuss how to do this Vedic Planetarium. And they actually sent people out, and they tried to get people from South India; there was a lot of effort that was made, you know, to try to get a good concept of how to present it. But they couldn't find anybody who was able to do it; at least not to Prabhupada's satisfaction. So it was one of those things that Prabhupada left with us."

(Interview with Hari Sauri dasa from Danavir Goswami's Vedic Cosmos documentary)

To their credit, Srila Prabhupada's disciples were able to independently prepare the map of the Bhu-mandala which was eventually presented to Srila Prabhupada in June and early July 1977. It was only at this late point that any kind of discussion regarding the difference between the Vedic and modern conceptions of the Earth had even begun to take place. We shall look at these discussions in the following papers.

The original maps presented by Srila Prabhupada have since disappeared, but would have looked something like this:



Even with a map such as the one above, it would be difficult for anyone to get the sense that these names, measurements, and symbols actually reveal that our Earth area is not a globe in space, but just a small part a much greater Earth area that spans the center of the universe. From the map alone it would be difficult to conceptualize how it translates into an actual landscape as in the image below:



Bhu-mandala Earth Disc (4Billion miles wide) from Srimad Bhagavatam



1. Island: Jambudvipa (800,000miles wide)
2. Lavana Ocean (800,000miles)
3. Mount Meru (Sumeru) (672,000miles above Earth, 128,000 below)
4. Bharata-varsha, one of the nine varshas of Jambudwipa.
The continents of our known Earth are in this area.
5. Island: Plaksadvipa (1,600,000miles)
6. Ikshu Ocean (1,600,000miles)
7. Island: Salmalidvipa (3,200,000miles)
8. Sura Ocean (3,200,000miles)
9. Island: Kusadvipa (6,400,000miles)
10. Sarpis or Grita Ocean (6,400,000miles)
11. Island: Krauncadvipa, then Kshira Ocean (Each 12,800,000miles)
12. Island: Sakadvipa then Dadhi Ocean (Each 25,600,000miles)
13. Island: Puskaradvipa, then Svadujala Ocean (Each 51,200,000)
14. Golden Land
15. Sun rotating above Manasottara Mountain on Puskaradvipa Island
16. Lokaloka Mountain (1Billion miles high)

We have hopefully established with reference to the above history that even as late as the above *Conversation With the Vedic Astronomer* in April 1977, Srila Prabhupada and his disciples did not have as much as a map, what to speak of some other kind of image that accurately conveyed the idea of the Earth's landscape and our own place upon it. Thus, it is hardly surprising that throughout the course of his preaching, Srila Prabhupada had simply spoken of the Earth in the conventional sense as a globe in space; and to the other parts of Bhu-mandala as 'the Earthly planets' or 'the Earthly planetary system'. In the absence of a clear conception of Bhu-mandala, what other language could he have used? Srila Prabhupada's unfamiliarity with the nature and lay-out of Bhu-mandala was due to the fact that all knowledge of Bhu-mandala had been covered over and practically forgotten before his transcendental inspiration to revive it in the modern world. In the light of this powerful preaching endeavour, it is hardly a fault on Srila Prabhupada's part that he spoke of the Earth in the conventional sense as a planet floating in space. Despite Srila Prabhupada's unfamiliarity with all the details of Bhu-mandala, the true nature of the Earth's shape and size will eventually come to light only because of Srila Prabhupada's own catalytic inspiration to revive Vedic cosmology in the modern world.