

OPEN LETTER TO SIVARAMA SWAMI

Dear Sivarama Swami. Dandavat pranama. Jaya Srila Prabhupada.

I apologize if answering this letter becomes a burden on your many other responsibilities. But I hope that you will consider the topic of this letter more important than institutional matters.

Recently I heard the following podcast from your website where you respond to a few questions about the changes made to Srila Prabhupada's books:

PODCAST: "Alleged changes to Srila Prabhupada's books" (min. 3:23 - 9:06)

<http://www.sivaramaswami.com/en/2010/11/03/vidyagati-dd-wants-to-know-about-the-alleged-changes-to-srila-prabhupadas-books-by-the-bbt/>

(A full transcript of your answer is given at the end of this e-mail).

I have a few comments and points I find important in relation to your response, and I hope you will find the time to answer each of them.

First of all I find it wonderful how you (citing Caitanya-Caritamrta, Adi-lila, Ch. 2, Text 117) encourage devotees to not be afraid of controversial matters, but to study these with the aim of making progress from kanistha-adhikari to madhyama-adhikari. It is very correct when you mention how important it is to be able to protect oneself and Srila Prabhupada's mission from the many different unjust accusations we often hear on the internet.

I especially appreciate these statements of yours:

"...he actually hears all sides of the arguments, sees what sadhu, sastra, guru says, and on the basis of real spiritual wisdom he is able to make a valued judgement. I think if devotees do that they'll understand things for themselves."

[...]

"...our real business is actually to have deep faith, proper knowledge, good discrimination in order not to become distracted and cheated..."

[...]

"...the facility of the internet is that it allows anyone to make and speak about anything, and more or less communicate to many many many people who may in all innocence be very easily distracted just by all types of very very strong and unjust accusations."

What you mention here is essential to spiritual progress, and with precisely this understanding in mind I have spend around 4 years investigating the changes to Srila Prabhupada's books on a daily basis, but I have not quite reached the same conclusion as you. I think there are some problems with the way Jayadvaita Swami has edited Srila Prabhupada's *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. I will mention some of these problems in this e-mail.

I hope that you will agree to have an open exchange about the topic online. If we are not willing to let devotees see an open exchange of viewpoints then how can we fulfill our common goal of helping devotees hear all sides of the arguments and reach a more informed opinion based on guru, sadhu, sastra? And how can we assist them in protecting themselves and Srila Prabhupada's mission from the many different unjust accusations we hear on the internet?

Point 1: Does the BBT Edit website mention every single change?

In your first point you encourage devotees to visit bbtedit.com, and you state that it contains explanations of "every single change".

My comments:

After investigating this matter I (and others) have found numerous changes that are not mentioned on the BBT Edit website. We are talking about hundreds, perhaps thousands. The devotees behind the BBT Edit website are carefully pointing to individual cases or data that seem to confirm their position, while the website ignores a significant portion of related cases or data that contradict their position. Thus they commit the fallacy of "[selective evidence](#)" or "[cherry picking](#)". The dishonest use of "selective evidence" is a major problem in the public debate about the book changes, and in my e-book *No Reply From BBTI* I am bringing awareness to the fact that there is a lot of data available that contradict BBT International's official explanations.

Here is a link to my e-book:

No Reply from BBTI:

<http://arsaprayoga.com/2015/08/21/e-book-no-reply-from-bbti/>

Another e-book on the changes is made by Bhakta Torben (former Harikesh Swami disciple) and it contains more than 100 examples of changes most of which are not mentioned by BBTI or Jayadvaita Swami. You can find his e-book here:

Blazing Edits:

<http://arsaprayoga.com/2015/08/20/blazing-edits/>

The fact that BBTI and Jayadvaita Swami (by suppressing evidence) have succeeded in misguiding devotees into believing that the BBT Edit website explains “every single change”, when it does not, is a major problem. In addition to the many changes that the BBT Edit website does not mention there are also no explanations as to why nearly all the original paintings (that Srila Prabhupada himself was involved in creating) have been replaced by other paintings. Even the front cover that Srila Prabhupada liked very much has been changed. Please see his quotes on the front cover here:

Srila Prabhupada’s Instructions on Front Covers not honored:

<http://arsaprayoga.com/2013/12/24/prabhupadas-instructions-on-front-covers-not-honored/>

I hope you consider this topic important enough to carefully study the two e-books I have provided above. They reveal that far from all changes has been mentioned by BBT International and Jayadvaita Swami, and they also reveal that many needless changes have been made. Many of these needless changes bring us further away from what Srila Prabhupada actually said (more about that below).

My conclusion is, therefore, that the BBT Edit website does not explain every single change. Far from. The website as a whole commits the fallacy of “[selective evidence](#)” / “[cherry picking](#)”.

Point 2: Do most of the changes bring us closer to what Srila Prabhupada originally said?

You state that the changes have brought us closer to what Srila Prabhupada originally said.

You offer two reasons for this:

- 1) You say that in that time devotees were not very experienced in Sanskrit.
- 2) You say they often did not understand clearly what Srila Prabhupada said over the dictaphone.

My comments:

It is true that the editors of the 1968 and the 1972 edition of the Gita made mistakes in the Sanskrit. It is also true that they made mistakes because they sometimes could not clearly hear what Srila Prabhupada was dictating. My estimation is, however, that the changes to these types of mistakes constitute no more than around 1% of the total amount of changes. So what about the rest?

Rupanuga Prabhu's wife, Krishna Kripa Devi Dasi, made an analysis of the changes to the verses of the Gita. 541 verses (77%) out of 700 were changed. Only 3% of these changes were limited to grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation etc. In 520 verses (74%), words were removed, rearranged, or inserted. The claim that Jayadvaita Swami was bringing the Gita closer to what Srila Prabhupada said, when he was removing, rearranging and inserting words in these 520 verses, is not supported by the full range of data. It is true only in some cases, but there are numerous (hundreds if not over a thousand) changes that bring the Gita further away from Srila Prabhupada. The two e-books I have mentioned provide ample evidence in support of this claim. It is also important to note that there are numerous changes to the purports that bring us further away from Srila Prabhupada.

As you can see in *No Reply From BBTI* I made an investigation into the changes to Srila Prabhupada's personally typewritten Sanskrit translations (the word-for-word section) found in the first chapter of the Gita. BBT International made around 130 changes to the word-for-word translations of that chapter alone. 89 (65.92%) of these changes fall in the category:

“Modifications not according to Srila Prabhupada's draft while the original edition follows Srila Prabhupada's draft.”

But even if Jayadvaita Swami's changes had brought us closer to what Srila Prabhupada said in his so-called original manuscripts (which are in reality discarded drafts) this would leave us with an additional problem. The attempted justification of making the books closer to the “original manuscripts” is a very unconventional and rather strange editorial method. Why would we let a discarded draft overrule the editorial work made by the author and his editor? This is especially strange when the author is no longer around to approve or disapprove the changes. Srila Prabhupada clearly states in the 1972 edition of his *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is* that this edition is itself “*the original manuscript*” and that it is “*the complete edition*”. This is the same as saying that all previous drafts are discarded (or at least have an inferior status) and that this 1972 edition is now the original manuscript.

Srila Prabhupada worked with Hayagriva Prabhu and Rayarama Prabhu to finish the 1972 edition of the Gita. We do not precisely know to what extent they co-operated, but we know that Srila Prabhupada and Hayagriva Prabhu lived in the same apartment for nearly three months while Hayagriva Prabhu was working daily on the editing of the Gita. Hayagriva Prabhu said that in this period he consulted Srila Prabhupada on nearly every verse to make sure Srila Prabhupada was satisfied. We also know that he and Srila Prabhupada were in contact via mail after this three months' period.

Changes to the drafts were made both by Srila Prabhupada himself (on his own initiative), and by Hayagriva Prabhu in consultation with Srila

Prabhupada. We do not know precisely which changes were made by their mutual co-operation. But changes were made in this way. And so by reverting to the drafts we are at great risk of undoing Srila Prabhupada's own editorial decisions.

After the editing was done Srila Prabhupada approved the galley proofs/blueprint. He sent the Gita to be printed, published, he ordered it read and distributed, and he gave lectures from it between 1972 - 1977 (he lectured from the 1968 edition between 1968 - 1977). He only asked for around three changes.

My conclusion is that it is simply not true that the majority of the changes to Srila Prabhupada's *Bhagavad Gita* are more in line with what Srila Prabhupada said in his drafts. And even if they were this could never constitute a justification for changing, since we cannot just change back to the drafts.

Before I proceed I would like to bring to your attention some e-books and articles related to the above:

Krishna Kripa Devi Dasi's analysis of the Gita:

<http://arsaprayoga.com/2013/09/30/whos-counting-541-verses-changed/>

Changes to Srila Prabhupada's personally typewritten Sanskrit translations:

<http://arsaprayoga.com/2014/01/21/changes-to-prabhupadas-personally-typewritten-sanskrit-translations-statistics-for-bg-chapter-one/>

Why we cannot change back to the "original manuscripts":

<http://arsaprayoga.com/2013/10/15/jayadvaita-undoes-prabhupadas-work-on-gita-manuscript/>

How Srila Prabhupada and Hayagriva Prabhu worked on the Gita:

<http://arsaprayoga.com/2013/09/15/bbti-myth-hayagrivas-memory-failed-him/>

Srila Prabhupada approved the galley proofs/blueprint:

<http://arsaprayoga.com/2013/08/31/prabhupada-did-the-proofreading-of-the-entire-bhagavad-gita-as-it-is/>

Point 3: Did Srila Prabhupada want his books changed?

Your third point is that there are many quotes, statements and testimonies by Srila Prabhupada's associates and servants to the effect that it was Srila Prabhupada's desire to have his books changed. You state that Srila Prabhupada didn't want to perpetuate other's mistakes in his books, and

that anyone who knows Srila Prabhupada knows that was not the way he worked.

My comments:

Since we are now not just talking about mistakes made by the editors, but about changes that bring us further away from what Srila Prabhupada actually said, we have a whole new scenario. And the fact that these changes are made after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance also changes the situation. There is no written statement that Srila Prabhupada allowed his books to be changed posthumously, and Jayadvaita Swami admits that there is no authorization from Srila Prabhupada to re-edit the Gita.

Jayadvaita Swami admits there is no authorization to re-edit the Gita:
<http://arsaprayoga.com/2013/08/25/jayadvaita-swami-admits-there-is-no-authorization/>

Srila Prabhupada spoke on the principle of arsa-prayoga (that we are not supposed to correct the words or mistakes of the acaryas). Of course, when the acarya demands our help to edit his books that is another story. But we cannot just take his books and start editing without his supervision and approval. We find the perfect example of this in Srila Prabhupada himself. By his own personal example he showed us the proper etiquette. When he came across mistakes in sastra he did not correct them. There is an important lesson for us in this. Here is an excellent article written on precisely that topic:

How Srila Prabhupada did not edit the mistakes of previous acaryas:
<http://arsaprayoga.com/2014/03/11/srila-prabhupadas-instructions-on-editing-are-in-his-own-books/>

We should note that even if mistakes that normally only fools make are found in the works of the acaryas, they should not be corrected. If one sees any fault in such so-called mistakes, the fault is his. These are the words of Caitanya Mahaprabhu:

Caitanya Mahaprabhu on editing the work of the acaryas:
<http://arsaprayoga.com/2013/08/24/caitanya-mahaprabhu-on-editing-the-work-of-a-vaisnava/>

On top of this how can we allow hundreds, if not thousands, of changes that bring us further away from what Srila Prabhupada actually said?

Point 4: Do the BBT Edit website refute the different arguments that people bring up?

You mention that the BBT Edit website not only gives justifications for the individual changes, but that it also refutes the different arguments that people are bringing up.

My comments:

My investigations have led me to find quite some problems with many of BBT International's attempted justifications. Here I will limit myself to comment on only two of these attempted justifications:

1) [The Mona Lisa argument](#):

Argument: *"If every year you were to change the Mona Lisa just one percent, in a hundred years you could end up with a picture of Alfred E. Neuman, the freaky kid who appears on the cover of MAD magazine."*

Response: *"Śrīla Prabhupāda said that an analogy, to succeed, should closely parallel what it's meant to illustrate. Yes, if every year you were to take the Mona Lisa one percent farther away from da Vinci's original, in a hundred years you could have a monster. But what if instead of going farther away you went closer? That's a more suitable analogy. That's what the art of restoration is all about—bringing a work closer to what the artist originally gave."*

The response from the BBT International perpetuates the false notion that the changes to *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* bring us "closer to Prabhupada". This is only true for some of the changes. But a significant amount of changes bring us further away from Prabhupada. This is clear from the evidence I have provided in this e-mail. So the real analogy would be like this: If every year you would make changes that bring us closer to the so-called original manuscripts and changes that bring us further away from both the 1972 edition and the so-called manuscripts, then in a hundred years you would have a *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* that is significantly different from what Srila Prabhupada gave. In two ways we would then be further away from Srila Prabhupada:

- 1) By changing back to the drafts (so-called original manuscripts) we would overrule many of Srila Prabhupada own editorial decisions.
- 2) By changing words and sentences that are not errors we would change Srila Prabhupada's own words, and replace them with the editor's.

2) [Many changes were unnecessary](#)

Argument: *"The editors have not merely fixed obvious mistakes. They made so many unnecessary changes that fix no errors and make no improvement to the book."*

Response: *"Yes, the editors didn't just fix obvious errors. They also fixed errors that weren't obvious. Consider: In law, in music, in accounting, in sports—in just about every field of human*

endeavor—errors that an untrained person may not see should be obvious to a person suitably trained. And so it is with editing.

To assume “If I don’t see an error, it’s not there” is a sign of muddy thinking.”

Here we have two unsubstantiated and contradictory assertions:

- 1) “There are unnecessary changes.”
- 2) “No there are not.”

BBT International makes it seem as if the devotees against the book changes simply claim that that there are unnecessary changes. But devotees have provided BBT International with numerous examples of such unnecessary changes. It would only be proper and fair if the BBT International mentioned these examples and gave us their answers to each of them. Instead they suppress the examples and thus avoid offering justifications for their changes.

One example of a needless change could be Bg. 9.1:

<http://arsaprayoga.com/2014/06/24/see-the-changes-to-bg-9-1/>

This change has no basis in the so-called original manuscripts, and we are clearly not talking about correcting errors. The change is not mentioned anywhere by BBT International or Jayadvaita Swami. BBT International wants us to believe that there are mistakes in the original Bg. 9.1 even if we do not see any. We are open-minded, and we are asking the BBT International to provide an explanation for this change.

The list of unsound arguments presented on the BBT Edit website is long, but I will end my e-mail here. I have mentioned other unsound arguments from BBT International on www.arsaprayoga.com. I hope you will investigate the e-books and my website further. And I hope to hear from you. I am sure that if we conduct an open exchange about this topic online we could help many devotees draw more informed conclusions about this topic based on guru, sadhu, sastra, logic and observation. Let us in this way co-operate in assisting devotees advance from kanistha- to madhyama-adhikari and help them avoid the unjust accusations we so often encounter on the internet.

Thank you for your time, and I apologize and beg forgiveness if I unintentionally committed offenses to you or other devotees while writing this e-mail.

Your servant,
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PODCAST: "Alleged changes to Srila Prabhupada's books" (min. 3:23 - 9:06)

Sivarama Swami reads:

"Okay, today I've got a question from Vidyagati Devi Dasi and she is asking...well, it is a long question, but basically she says that she has been getting sort of internet messages about how Srila Prabhupada's books - particularly Bhagavad-gita - has been changed, unauthorisedly changed. And she says: "Why did these changes been made, and why would anyone do that, and who would do that?"

Rather than myself getting into just a brief explanation of that I suggest that devotees see the BBT website which is called www.bbtedit.com. And that is very very extensive with articles...every single change. It has videos on it...every single change that was actually made - I'll continue using the word "change" - although its actually in most cases it wasn't a change. It was actually bringing it to the original that Srila Prabhupada himself had made...has said, but was perhaps misunderstood by devotees and, anyway there is a whole history behind it.

If you really really want to know and really want to become tuned into why it is that for instance Bhagavad-gita As It Is is different than the original Macmillan version that was put out in Srila Prabhupada's time then go to this bbtedit.com and read all the things. I think once you do you will be very thoroughly convinced. It's in my opinion a really airtight presentation.

And basically the answer was...is that in that time devotees were not no. 1) very experienced in Sanskrit, no. 2) they didn't very often understand clearly what Srila Prabhupada said over the dictaphone. And the changes that were made were made to bring things closer to what Srila Prabhupada had said. Closer, and to what Srila Prabhupada was actually saying. And there are also many quotes, statements, testimonies by Srila Prabhupada's associates and servants to that effect that this was Srila Prabhupada's desire. Srila Prabhupada didn't want to perpetuate other's mistakes in his book for some type of unexplicable reason. Anyone who knows Srila Prabhupada knows that wasn't the way he worked. So, and they also give all the different indivi...not just the individual changes, but the different arguments that people are bringing up, and refuting those arguments.

So see it for yourself. Siddhānta baliyā citte nā kara alasa. This is what it means to be a madhyama-adhikari. Madhyama-adhikari is someone who's faith isn't just easily effected by the last thing that he hears. But he actually hears all sides of the arguments, sees what sadhu, sastra, guru says, and on the basis of real spiritual wisdom he is able to make a valued judgement. I think if devotees do that they'll understand things for themselves. And

that's the important thing of what Srila Prabhupada in the beginning of the Bhagavatam says that one should quickly come from the platform of being kanistha-adhikari. Kanistha-adhikari is one who has weak faith and one who has little knowledge. Both of those things are very dangerous. And having strong faith and little knowledge that maybe more dangerous because the tendency may be to have strong faith in the wrong thing as well. If you have strong faith in the right thing that's all right. But our real business is actually to have deep faith, proper knowledge, good discrimination in order not to become distracted and cheated by what is unfortunately the phenomena in our modern day and age. As you have heard me say many times before [1 sec. inaudible] the facility of the internet is that it allows anyone to make and speak about anything, and more or less communicate to many many many people who may in all innocence be very easily distracted just by all types of very very strong and unjust accusations. So visit that BBT Edit website and then you can judge for yourself."

- END -