

OPEN LETTER TO BIR KRISHNA GOSWAMI:

Dear Bir Krishna Goswami. Dandavat pranama. Jaya Srila Prabhupada.

I would like to apologize if answering this letter becomes a burden on your many other institutional responsibilities.

However to many devotees who avidly study Srila Prabhupada's books, we feel that getting the correct message "As It Is" is of utmost importance. Devotees that are dedicated to understanding the message in order to deliver it properly must question any deviations from the pure devotion imparted by our beloved founder Acharya. With every change of the original message there lies the possibility of further change until the original message is lost, much like the Bible has lost so much of the original teachings of the prophets and Lord Jesus, thus allowing Christians to break all the principles originally taught by God. This is why many of us dare to challenge the current institutional authorities about this issue.

We therefore plead that the philosophical issue of imparting the truth is more important than the business of running the institution.

Recently I heard the below Q&A session where you, among other things, speak about the changes made to Srila Prabhupada's books:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdsG_v948XA

[From 15:35 - 19:36]

You were asked the following question:

"Have the changes in Srila Prabhupada's books been bona fide, and is Bhagavad-Gita really still "As It Is" since so many corrections have been applied?"

I have a few points I want to raise regarding your answer. I thought it best to address you directly in an open letter thereby giving you the opportunity to respond. Since this is an open letter it will also be posted on the Internet.

I hope you will find time to respond to the points I raise.

English is not my first language so I apologize for any mistakes you may find in this open letter.

Point 1: Are the majority of the changes more in line with what Srila Prabhupada actually said?

Your first point is that the majority of changes to Srila Prabhupada's books are more in line with what Srila Prabhupada actually said.

You offer two reasons for this:

- 1) The devotees who were transcribing the books did not properly understand Srila Prabhupada's accent, and therefore they mistranscribed many words.
- 2) In some of the original books we find the wrong verse for the wrong purport.

You conclude this point by restating that these were the majority of corrections.

My comment:

After having studied the issue at hand on a daily basis for around 4 years I have reached a different conclusion:

It is true that we find some mistakes in Srila Prabhupada's original books. Some are made by transcribers, and some, although extremely few, are mistakes like the wrong verse attached to the wrong purport. As far as I can see corrections of these types constitute less than 1% of the total amount of the posthumous changes made to Srila Prabhupada's *Bhagavad-Gita As Is It*.

My observation is that the majority of changes are, in fact, not more in line with what Srila Prabhupada originally said. I guess when you say they are "more in line with what Srila Prabhupada said" you are referring to what we find in the so-called original manuscripts (which are in reality discarded drafts). The BBT International try to convince us that they have changed the books back to what Srila Prabhupada originally said in his "original manuscripts".

There are several problems with this claim:

The first problem is that this is only true in some cases, but far from all. I would say that at least half of the changes, if not more, are not in line with what Srila Prabhupada said in the "original manuscripts". Many changes are, in fact, neither in line with the "original manuscripts", the 1972 edition nor the 1968 edition, but are instead wholly the words of Jayadvaita Swami. A lot of the changes in this category are also needless, and Srila Prabhupada opposed needless changes according to Jayadvaita Swami himself:

"As you know, and as we kept in mind while doing the work, Srila Prabhupada staunchly opposed needless changes." (Jayadvaita Swami, Letter to Amogha Lila, 1986)

There are plenty of times where the texts in the 1972 edition are in line with the "original manuscripts" and are also grammatically correct, clear and easy to understand, but where Jayadvaita Swami still chose to change them – often for reasons he does not explain.

Another problem with BBT International's attempted justification of making the books closer to the "original manuscripts" is the very unconventional and rather strange editorial method of letting a discarded draft overrule the editorial work made by the author and his editor. This is especially strange to do 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 and this 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 cooperated, 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 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 in consultation with him. And we do not know precisely which changes they agreed upon. So by reverting to the drafts we are at great risk of undoing Srila Prabhupada's own editorial work.

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.

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:

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

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

Hayagriva Prabhu worked closely with Srila Prabhupada:

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

How 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/>

E-books containing more than 100 changes to the Gita (most of which are not explained by BBT International):

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

E-book with examples of highly problematic changes that BBT International have not explained:

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

If you go through the above material I think you will see that the majority of changes are not corrections of mistakes made by the editors.

Point 2: Are the rest of the changes grammatical in nature?

Your next point is that the rest of corrections are grammatical in nature.

My comment:

Rupanuga Prabhu's wife, Krishna Kripa Devi Dasi, made an analysis that revealed that 77% of all verses in Gita has been changed. And out of these 77% only 3% were changes to grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation etc. In 520 verses (74%), words were removed, rearranged, or inserted. Many, if not most, of these changes do not bring us closer to the "original manuscripts". Many bring us further away from them.

You can read her analysis here:

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

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."

More details here:

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

Based on that evidence I have reached the conclusion that it is far from true that the rest of the changes are grammatical in nature.

Point 3: How authorized is Jayadvaita Swami?

Your third point is that Srila Prabhupada authorized Jayadvaita Swami to edit his books, including the Gita.

My comment:

Jayadvaita Swami clearly states that he was not instructed by Srila Prabhupada to edit the *Bhagavad-gita*:

“To my knowledge, Srila Prabhupada never asked us to re-edit the book.”
(Jayadvaita Swami’s Letter to Amogha Lila 1986)

You refer to the fact that Srila Prabhupada at one point stated that Jayadvaita Swami was good, and that whatever editing he did was authorized by Srila Prabhupada. But I think that you will agree that this approval by Srila Prabhupada was conditional. Jayadvaita Swami was still supposed to stay within the boundaries that Srila Prabhupada had given regarding editing. If Jayadvaita Swami had fallen in maya or if he had started to violate the instructions that Srila Prabhupada had given then his editing would no longer be acceptable. And this is, of course, also true now - after Srila Prabhupada’s disappearance.

For example, while Srila Prabhupada was on the planet he praised Nitai Dasa’s editorial work. Later Nitai Prabhu became puffed-up due to his so-called Sanskrit skills and fell in maya. Srila Prabhupada then called him a rascal.

The following conversation between Srila Prabhupada and Ramesvara Prabhu also drives the point home that just because Srila Prabhupada at one point in time gave Jayadvaita Swami the stamp of approval it is not a matter of course that Jayadvaita Swami can never lose that stamp of approval if he acts against Srila Prabhupada’s instructions:

Prabhupada: “I have given you charge of this BBT, millions of dollars you are dealing, but it is not for your misuse. As soon as you misuse, that is your responsibility.

Ramesvara: Yes, but he says but still, you’ll know that I’m going to misuse it.

Prabhupada: No. That Krsna knows, when something charge is given. But because you are independent, I know that “Ramesvara is very good boy; let him be in charge.” But you can misuse at any moment, because you have got independence. You can misuse at any moment. At that time your position is different. (Morning Walk — June 3, 1976, Los Angeles)

So, given the evidence, my conclusion is that Jayadvaita Swami’s position is different now because he misused his independence.

Here are a few articles that give further clarification on these points:

Jayadvaita Swami admits there is no authorization:

<http://arsaprayoga.com/2013/08/25/jayadvaita-swami-admits-there-is-no-authorization/>

BBT International's main argument fails:

<http://arsaprayoga.com/2014/04/19/at-that-time-your-position-is-different/>

Is Jayadvaita Swami still good?:

<http://arsaprayoga.com/2013/09/14/is-jayadvaita-swami-still-good/>

Point 4: No difference between the two editions?

Your fourth point is that you do not see any difference between the two editions (the 1972 edition and the 1983 edition).

My comment:

In your answer you state this three times, and in all three instances you contradict yourself by first stating that there is no difference between the two editions, and then stating right after that the 1983 edition is better. If the 1983 edition is better, then logically speaking the books are not the same. They are different.

Another thing is that if the two editions really were the same (were equal) then why make changes to the original edition in the first place? If the result of all these changes simply is that the books are still the same, then what was the point?

There is no other way to understand your point than to think you really consider the 1983 edition a superior edition. And I think you are wrong for the reasons I am delineating in this e-mail. I pray to Krishna that you are willing to take a closer look at the evidence I am presenting.

Point 5: Are the changes to Srila Prabhupada's books similar to the changes we make when we translate them to foreign languages?

Your fifth point centers on translations from English to foreign languages. You seem to think that changing Srila Prabhupada's original English books is equal to translating them to foreign languages.

My comment:

It is not clear to me what the relation between changing Srila Prabhupada's English books and translating them into a foreign language is. These are two very different things. Jayadvaita Swami is changing Srila Prabhupada's original books and then publishing the changed editions as if they were still Srila Prabhupada's books. He does not follow the standard practice of at least mentioning the editor's name on the front cover of the book. So people are actually being cheated because they think they get a book 100% written and/or approved by Srila Prabhupada.

But when we are translating from English to a foreign language we do not publish the translations as if they were the source text itself. Everyone who buys a translated book knows that this book is a translation, and therefore also knows that this book might contain the different problems that translations tend to come with. This is, however, not a major problem because a person skeptical about the accuracy of a given translation can always check with the original source text.

When it comes to Srila Prabhupada's books a given translation can be anywhere between good and bad, but it can always be changed to make it closer to the original English edition approved by Srila Prabhupada. But this is not the case for the English edition itself. If the original source text of Srila Prabhupada (the 1972 edition) is changed then we run the risk that people will find the books inauthentic. The changes made by Jayadvaita Swami are so many and so big that it is no longer the same book. His editing has left us with a new Gita, and we have no way of knowing if Srila Prabhupada would approve it or not. For sure he would never have approved Jayadvaita Swami's editorial liberalism (for the reasons already presented). BBT International has a duty to always make all Srila Prabhupada's original books available, and if they insist on publishing changed editions (which I personally think is wrong) they should at least write on the cover of the books that these are edited by such and such. They should also be honest about what kinds of changes were made.

So, there is a clear difference between changing Srila Prabhupada's English books and translating them into foreign languages.

Point 6: Does BBT International's website present an objective study of the book changes?

In your sixth point you mention that anyone can go to BBT International's website to see each change that was made.

My comment:

Jayadvaita Swami makes it seem as if he is mentioning all the changes on BBT International's website, but he is not. Far from. There are thousands of changes in the 1983 Gita alone that are not according to Srila Prabhupada's draft while the original edition follows Srila Prabhupada's draft. And they are not errors either. And hundreds of these are not mentioned anywhere by Jayadvaita Swami. Also not on his website. In the two e-books I mentioned above (*No Reply from BBTI* and *Blazing Edits*) almost all changes mentioned are not explained anywhere by Jayadvaita Swami. The website therefore presents a misleading picture of what has happened.

Point 7: Are the devotees who criticize the changed editions envious?

In your seventh point you claim that people are criticizing the work of Jayadvaita Swami, BBT International and the GBC (who supports them) because they are envious. You also claim that their objections are emotional.

My comment:

Obviously I am disappointed by your answer which commits both the [ad hominem fallacy](#) (personal attack) and the [psychogenetic fallacy](#). Your answer is therefore itself emotional/non-rational.

I sincerely hope that you will investigate the material I have presented. I feel confident that it will make you see things different. And I hope you will find time to answer the points I raise.

And I apologize and ask for forgiveness if I have committed any offenses.

Thanks for your valuable time.
Your servant,
Ajit Krishna Dasa

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Transcription of video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdsG_v948XA):

Devotee:

"Have the changes in Srila Prabhupada's books been bona fide, and is *Bhagavad-gita* really still "As It Is" [Bir Krishna Goswami start laughing] since so many corrections have been applied?"

Bir Krishna Goswami:

"The majority of corrections that have been made are actually more in line with what Prabhupada said because when Prabhupada was dictating the books originally many devotees did not understand Prabhupada's accent, especially the Bengali accent, and they mis-transcribed a lot of the information that Prabhupada was giving. In addition, in some of Prabhupada's books as they were originally published, there was the wrong verse for the wrong purport. You know, devotees just made mistakes when they were doing that. But the majority...those were the majority of corrections. But the other corrections were simply grammatical corrections, which Prabhupada authorized Jayadvaita Maharaja to make. He said whatever corrections he makes is all right. So Prabhupada was authorizing...

I don't find the books any different. I just find them more accurate in terms of what Prabhupada actually said. I mean, just like, for example, when you translate from English to Slovenian you have to change a lot of the grammar there. Because there is not always a corresponding word for every word in English. I used to work on the translation from English to Spanish and I know that sometimes you have to take one word and explain that one word with three words. Or sometimes there is three words and you explain it with one word. So Prabhupada allowed that sort of adjustment because how else can you translate!

If you do a literal word-by-word translation it sometimes...it doesn't even make sense to people. So it is important to have that sort of leeway or have that sort of ability to adjust little grammatical things so people can understand, And that's it.

I mean, the book...it's the same book. I use the new *Bhagavad-gita*. I also use the old *Bhagavad-gita*. And I don't see any difference between the two of them. Nor the Bhagavatam. Nor any of the other books. In fact, I mean...it it's closer to what Prabhupada wanted and what Prabhupada said. All right?

Although, and if you are interested in the different changes on the BBT website there's a list and you can see why each change was made. I think Jayadvaita Maharaja went through that whole thing on the BBT website.

But why, you know, why are people criticizing! I guess they have...I do not want to say this...envious, but they are just...you know they feel left out, they want some position in ISKCON and whatever reason. It is a psychological, emotional reasons that they criticize.

But practically speaking the books are the same. And actually even better. You know Prabhupada made a grammatical mistake, how can you allow that to be published! Because it would look very bad for Srila Prabhupada, and for our movement. So things have to be edited grammatically. Like we do in Slovenian. Isn't it? When you translate something then you have an editor that goes through it to make sure that grammatically it's exact...it's proper grammar. I mean, if you sound like a low class person in Slovenian nobody will appreciate our books. So we want to sound high class in our presentation of Krishna consciousness.

But...nothing was changed. I mean, even the controversial things that Prabhupada said in his books were not taken out or changed. Even things that, you know, would sometimes disturb the Western mentality. Like in the *Bhagavad-gita* it talks about how women need to be protected and everything like that. That's still there. You know, if we really wanted to change things then we would take out the controversial things [laughs slightly]. But we didn't do that. Okay, next questions.