

Nemi Bhaktivedanta

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A group of preachers who have been initiated by our Srila Gurudeva have challenged his statements about the svarupa of our Srila Prabhupada. The following paper is a comment on their process for obtaining and spreading spiritual knowledge.

Following Srila Gurudeva (slightly amended version)

Our Srila Gurudeva said repeatedly that our Srila Prabhupada is in madhurya-rasa. It has recently been asserted that our Srila Prabhupada is not in madhurya-rasa, but in sakhya-rasa, and that Srila Gurudeva's saying otherwise is not a factual instruction, but a preaching strategy. I am not qualified to try to prove anything about Srila Prabhupada's svarupa one way or the other, but I want to point out that the sakhya-rasa assertion is based on a completely invalid procedure for obtaining and propagating supposedly transcendental knowledge; and it is any case very weak, because the evidence for madhurya-rasa is far stronger than the case for sakhya-rasa.

In any case, the situation raises some important issues regarding how we accept our Gurudeva's instructions:

- (1) Is it legitimate to challenge one's spiritual master's instructions, or interpret them without his express permission?
- (2) Did Srila Gurudeva say things he did not mean (in other words, did he lie to his disciples) as a preaching strategy?
- (3) Do we understand previous acaryas through our present guru, or can we jump over our present guru to understand previous acaryas?
- (4) Is Srila Gurudeva's "madhurya-rasa" assertion reasonable, in the light of Srila Prabhupada's own instructions?

Disclaimer: This paper is not meant to challenge Prabhupada disciples' (for example in ISKCON) conviction that our Srila Prabhupada is in sakhya-rasa. I am not qualified to debate that issue, nor do I want to do so. The paper is only meant for devotees in the sanga of Srila BV Narayana Goswami Maharaja.

- (1) Is it legitimate to challenge one's spiritual master's instructions, or interpret them without his express permission?

Srila Gurudeva wanted us to accept his instructions as they are, and he was careful to give instructions that we could in principle follow, otherwise we would commit offences. To interpret the instructions of the spiritual master is to introduce some other point of view as being more authoritative than our guru's instructions, which nullifies the guru-disciple relationship. Further, preachers who encourage other disciples to take a relative point of view of their Guru Maharaja are nullifying their own position as a bona fide representative of the guru.

Srila BR Sridhara Maharaja pointed out that there are two points of view on the Guru: the absolute and the relative. Disciples must have an absolute, rather than a relative view, of their Guru Maharaja. They will not second-guess their Guru Maharaja, but will accept his instructions as they are, without improving or interpreting them, unless their Guru Maharaja has given a specific instruction to do so. Our Srila Gurudeva did not appear to do so. Indeed, it is impossible to even think that he consistently lied to his disciples as a "preaching strategy".

It appears that the proponents of the sakhya-rasa theory have aligned themselves with a different line of descent from Srila Sarasvati Prabhupada, through through Srila Bhakti-jivana Janardana Maharaja to BV Madhusudana Maharaja. That is a matter of personal choice, but there are some special considerations in that case.

Godbrothers or other members of the Vaishnava community - as distinct from disciples - may within their own sanga have either a relative or an absolute view of the guru and his instructions; that is a matter of choice. However, it is not legitimate for members of another line to come into Srila Gurudeva's sanga and propagate a relative view of his instructions. Guru-nistha is the

backbone of bhakti, and once that is weakened or broken, the disciple cannot advance. Specifically, members of the line coming through Srila Janardana Maharaja may have a relative view of our Srila Gurudeva, within the context of their own sanga, but that limits their interactions with Srila Gurudeva's sanga. Further, suppose initiated disciples of our Srila Gurudeva find absolute shelter in that (or another) line, and adopt a relative view of Srila Gurudeva's instructions. In that case, it is not legitimate for them to share their relative view of him and his instructions with his other disciples, and at the same time pose as our Srila Gurudeva's representatives. The conduct of those who are publicly contradicting Srila Gurudeva's instructions is against Vaishnava sad-acara. This is an invalid process for propagating knowledge.

(2) Did Srila Gurudeva say things he did not mean as a preaching strategy?

In 2008, Srila Gurudeva called all his sannyasis and told them that he wanted them to start giving initiation. Many considered: "This is a test because some sannyasis actually want to take disciples." I heard personally from one of my Godbrothers, who related how he personally went to Srila Gurudeva afterwards and asked if he gave instructions that he did not mean. Srila Gurudeva said, "No".

Once we were with Srila Gurudeva before Gaura-mandala parikrama, and Srila Trivikrama Maharaja called to us, "Don't listen to him. He is very tricky."

Srila Gurudeva replied, "Trivikrama is tricky. Narayana is very simple."

Obviously, once we give ourselves the right to interpret Guru's instructions to suit our understanding, there is chaos. Where is the evidence that Srila Gurudeva was prepared to lie consistently to his disciples as a "preaching strategy"?

In the case in question, formally initiated disciples of Gurudeva have accepted a third party's statement as being more authoritative than our Gurudeva's statements, and they want to change Srila Gurudeva's instructions to suit or validate their new understanding. The proper way of obtaining spiritual knowledge is to check new information with guru-shastra-sadhu, which in this case has not been done; rather, the version of guru-shastra-sadhu has been changed to suit the new knowledge. So the process for obtaining knowledge is also invalid.

(3) Do we understand previous acaryas through our present guru, or can we jump over our present guru to understand previous acaryas?

In Srila Gurudeva's biography of his Guru Maharaja, he has put forward the principle that we understand previous acaryas through the medium of our present guru. His Guru Maharaja said publicly, "Therefore we must understand the commentary of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura through the medium of Srila Prabhupada and we should give prominence to Srila Prabhupada's commentary."

Since the early 90's, Srila Gurudeva has repeatedly said that Srila Prabhupada is in madhurya-rasa, and he gave personal instructions to at least one of his own Western sannyasis to that effect.

Therefore, bona fide disciples will accept that instruction until he countermands it, which he has not done. BV Muni Maharaja and BV Bhagavata Maharaja also personally heard from Srila Gour Govinda Maharaja that Srila Prabhupada is in madhurya-rasa (for more information, please see: <http://www.cowdust.info>).

The members of the sakhya-rasa party have received formal initiation from Srila Gurudeva, and some have received shiksha and diksha from Srila Gour Govinda Maharaja. What other instruction can be more authoritative for disciples of Srila Gurudeva or Srila Gour Govinda Maharaja than the instructions of their respective gurus?

(4) Is Srila Gurudeva's madhurya-rasa assertion reasonable, in the light of what Srila Prabhupada wrote?

The question arises, "Given this new suggestion, does Srila Gurudeva's instruction agree with what Srila Prabhupada wrote, or is the new sakhya-rasa suggestion more reasonable?"

Syamarani Didi has written a beautiful and wonderful paper addressing this issue. I am just adding a very few of the many available passages in which Srila Prabhupada clearly and unequivocally expresses madhurya-rasa.

The sakhya-rasa party has made much of Srila Prabhupada's prayers on the Jaladuta, where in one verse, he clearly and beautifully expresses separation in sakhya-bhava. However, the refrain which starts and ends the prayer, and is sung for each verse, tells a different story: "Krishna, O my brother, you will obtain your good fortune only when Srimati Radharani becomes pleased with you. I am telling you this extremely emphatically." It is most reasonable to see this refrain as an expression of sakhya-rasa (which may arise as a temporary mood in madhurya-rasa) by a member of Srimati Radhika's group.

Some have suggested that Srila Prabhupada's establishment of Krishna-Balarama also shows that he is sakhya-rasa. They have not taken the trouble to read his own instructions. In CC MI 16.281 he very clearly states that he wants to show that Krishna-Balarama (who are of course well known in Vraja) have appeared as Nitai-Gauranga, and then to help people to enter Radha-Krishna pastimes by the mercy of Lord Caitanya. In any case, the proponents of the sakhya-rasa rumour are themselves staying in their own Krishna-Balarama mandir, so by that logic, the original mood in that temple should be sakhya-rasa. (If that were to be the case, then the whole issue is null and void, because, whatever Srila Prabhupada's actual rasa, he may appear in sakhya-rasa to please a devotee in sakhya-rasa, as we see in Jaiva-dharma. In that case, the fact that someone has had a dream of Srila Prabhupada in sakhya-rasa would not be sufficient grounds to start such a massive disturbance in Srila Gurudeva's sanga.)

Srila Prabhupada certainly had his own preaching strategy for presenting the very elevated Gaudiya philosophy and practice to an audience who were neither elevated nor qualified. He did not divulge his full purpose at once. For example, regarding the origin of the jiva, he made many statements in letters, lectures and in conversations, which could easily be construed to mean that we fell from the spiritual world. However, in his books (the law books for the next 10,000 years) he was always very clear: we did not fall from the spiritual world, and no one can fall from the spiritual world.

Similarly, Srila Prabhupada saw that we were not ready for the full Gaudiya Vaishnava conception of madhurya-rasa. He pointed this out in several places in his books, but for the most part, he concentrated on the basics. Even so, in lectures he sometimes spoke straight from madhurya-rasa:

So this Krishna conscious movement is meant for taking these misguided living beings to the topmost perfection of life in the radha-krishna-pranaya-vikriti. [Lecture -- Mayapur, March 29, 1975]

So, we being expansion of the spiritual Lakshmi, or Radharani, our duty is to serve Radharani, and through Radharani to serve Krishna. This is Krishna consciousness movement. [Lecture Engagement at Birla House -- Bombay, December 17, 1975] (Generally, jivas in the material world have emanated from Maha-Vishna, and those in the spiritual world have emanated from Baladeva or Sankarsana. Only Radha's associates, not cowherd boys, are Her personal expansions.)

This Krishna consciousness movement is for approaching Radha-Krishna, to be associated with the Supreme Lord in His sublime pleasure dance. That is the aim of Krishna consciousness. [Purport to Nitai-Pada-Kamala -- Los Angeles, December 21, 1968]

We can understand Srila Prabhupada's real position from his books, where there are many unequivocal statements from madhurya-rasa. For example, a cowherd boy cannot write the following passage; it can only come from a gopi in Srimati Radharani's group:

Srimati Radharani is the center of all Vrindavana's activities. In Vrindavana, Krishna is the instrument of Srimati Radharani; therefore all the inhabitants of Vrindavana still chant "Jaya Radhe!" From Krishna's own statement given herein, it appears that Radharani is the Queen of Vrindavana and that Krishna is simply Her decoration. [CC Madhya 13.150, purport] (The most intimate cowherd boyfriends are of course very favourable to Radha, but they support Krishna. They will not say that He is Her instrument and decoration.)

In Vrindavana Krishna is addressed as Radha-Krishna—Krishna, the property of Radharani. Thus one who wants to be elevated to this transcendental stage of perfection should follow in the footsteps of the damsels of Vraja as an assistant maidservant of the gopis. [TLC 30: The

Transcendental Pastimes of Radha and Krishna]

The associates of Radharani include Her personal associates, called sakhis, and Her near assistants, called manjaris. One should think of Radha and Krsna twenty-four hours a day and engage in Their service within one's mind, not externally change one's dress. By adopting the mood of the associates and friends of Radharani and following in their footsteps, one can ultimately achieve the perfectional stage of being transferred to Goloka Vrndavana, the transcendental abode of Krsna. By adopting this emotional mood of following in the footsteps of the gopis, one attains his siddha-deha. [TLC 31: The Supreme Perfection]

In The Nectar of Instruction, verse 8, our Srila Prabhupada for the most part follows his Guru Maharaja's commentary, where he describes the shelter for the various rasas. Srila Sarasvati Prabhupada concludes: "... those aspiring to serve in the conjugal mellow (madhurya-rasa) should follow cowherd girls (gopis) like Lalita and Vishakha." However, Srila Prabhupada enlarges on this: "...in the madhurya-rasa, characterized by conjugal love, one can become like Srimati Radharani or Her lady friends such as Lalita and Her serving maids (manjaris) like Rupa and Rati. This is the essence of all instruction in the matter of devotional service." [NoI: verse 8] His Guru Maharaja made no mention of Rupa and Rati Manjaris, so why should Srila Prabhupada, unless he has a special affinity?

Srila Prabhupada's books, which provide the main evidence, are fully consistent with Srila Gurudeva's assertion that Srila Prabhupada is a manjari, as is inevitable for an acarya in the line of Caitanya Mahaprabhu. There is not the slightest reason to doubt our Srila Gurudeva's instructions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the answers to the four questions I mentioned above are:

- (1) It is not legitimate to challenge one's spiritual master's instructions, or interpret them without his express permission, which we have not received from Srila Gurudeva.
- (2) I have not seen evidence that Srila Gurudeva said things that he did not mean as a preaching strategy. I personally will never believe that he lied to Srila Prabhupada's disciples in order to attract them.
- (3) We understand previous acaryas through our present guru, and we do not jump over our present guru to understand previous acaryas.
- (4) Srila Gurudeva's assertion that Srila Prabhupada's svarupa is in madhurya-rasa is perfectly reasonable, in the light of what Srila Prabhupada wrote in his books.

The sakhya-rasa party have gained their conviction and are propagating it by an invalid process that involves jumping over their guru and whimsically contradicting his instructions. This is contrary to Vaishnava sad-acara. The consensus amongst a group of older and experienced devotees is that they cannot hold their present position and at the same time be authentic representatives of our Srila Gurudeva. For example, I have just received the following message: "The North American Sanga's of Srila B.V. Narayan Maharaja (called Bhakti America) have sent a communique to all the (Srila Narayana Maharaja's) Sanga's in the USA that this (Krishna Balarama Mission's preachers) will not be supported in any of the temples, centers or Sanga's in North America."



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