

THE TRUTH OF HOW SRIMATI SYAMARANI EDITED THE BOOKS OF SRILA NARAYAN MAHARAJA

Unfortunately some people are criticizing Srimati Syamarani by saying that she has changed the words of her Siksha Guru Srila Narayan Maharaja by her editing. The persons who are criticizing are under the assumption that Srimati Syamarani acted on her own independently in her editing work. Even more astonishing is that these critics are insinuating that Srimati Syamarani changed the words of Srila Narayan Maharaja willfully in order to suit her own hidden agenda. None of these criticisms could be further from the truth. In the editors preface to the 2007 morning walks book Srimati Syamarani explains how it is that she went about the editing process in order to guarantee that what was being presented in Srila Gurudeva's books and lecture transcriptions was in fact what he wanted to say. This will all be explained in the article below. It is a sad day that someone of Srimati Syamarani's spiritual stature should be so falsely criticized however this is the material world and we pray that those who are criticizing her will be mercifully forgiven by Guru and Krishna. Thank you very much Hare Krishna
Swami B.V. Bhagavat

Why We Edit The Way We Do

Whenever Sri Srimad Bhaktivedanta Narayana Gosvami Maharaja would speak during morning walks or private darsanas like those presented in this series of books, he would shower us with wisdom and instructions. Tens of thousands of his disciples and followers were so fortunate as to receive this direct guidance. As we sat before him, listening to the tone of his voice, watching his facial expressions – his smiles, his frowns, the expressions of his eyes – and noting his gestures, it was easy, for the most part, to understand his words and grasp his intent. However, when those same words are transcribed onto paper, the meaning is sometimes lost.

It was a dilemma. He had instructed us to publish his classes in English. He had repeatedly told us that his teachings should be recorded, received, and understood. He asked, time and again, that books be made of his morning walks and darsanas. But English was not his mother language, and direct transcriptions of his words did not suitably represent him. Still, how could we edit? Editing the words of a pure Vaisnava seemed like a transgression of proper etiquette.

We discussed our quandary with him, not once or twice, but many, many times. Srila Gurudeva was not only very much aware that his words had to be edited; it was his idea, and he gave various persons this responsibility. He clearly understood the importance of clear communication – the power of the written word in broadcasting the message of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. He repeatedly directed us to edit his words so as to clearly represent his meaning to Western readers.

Since 1997, when we first began the editing of Srila Gurudeva's classes, we asked him thousands of questions to clarify what he meant to say. This was done in person and by email, and he always kindly replied. We also asked thousands of questions to his personal servant, who, having heard Srila Gurudeva explain the same points many, many times in Hindi and Bengali, also kindly answered our questions, and continues to do so to the present day.

The following are examples of the type of editing we have done:

Sometimes we have had to substitute words or phrases. For example, Srila Gurudeva told us that when he could not think of the English equivalent to a Hindi word, he may say “anything” or “thing.” For example, paraphrasing Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura, he once said, “If I've told, and you have understand anything rather thing, not proper thing, so it is my fault that I could not make you understand. So God and suddha-bhaktas (pure devotees) should forgive me.” He was actually wanting to say, “If I've told something, and you have understood it in a different way, not in the proper way, then it is my fault that I could not make you understand. May God and the suddha-bhaktas forgive me.”

Sometimes we have had to add the intended meaning. He once said that before Srila Bhaktivedanta Svami Prabhupada came to America he had no personality. He actually meant that Srila Prabhupada was not a well-known personality. When he said that the gopis passed through the narrow galleries of Govardhana, he meant that they passed through the narrow alleyways. Yet another example is

when he told us that when he had said, “The gopis knew by Purnima and Gargacarya that Krsna is God, yet they never saw Him as a God,” his real meaning was, “The gopis heard from Purnima and Gargacarya that Krsna is God, but they did not believe this. They personally never saw Him as God.” He told us, “ ‘knew’ means ‘heard from others.’ It was not their view.” He expected us to add the intended meaning to the transcript.

Once in Hawaii, Srila Gurudeva gave a strong lecture, and near the end he said, “I challenge anyone to....” The next morning he called his transcribers and editors to his quarters and told them that he doesn’t want to sound pinching. He said to change that phrase to “I humble invite anyone to....”

In this regard, we take shelter of the wisdom of the venerable Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Gosvami Maharaja, in a darsana given in March, 1978. (Only the punctuation was edited by us.) “Srila Sridhara Maharaja: Our gurudeva, he dictated in English some instructions once, but little faulty from the standpoint of correct English. Then our one professor Bhaal, disciple, he told that [it is the] dictionary [that] should be corrected. What Gurudeva says, it is alright.

“Assembly: [Laughter] Jaya.

“Srila Sridhara Maharaja: Do you follow? “Grammar and dictionary should be corrected, but what guru says it is alright.” Then another, little higher, position disciple, he told that that is the lowest class disciples’ statement. The higher class disciple will see that what guru wants from him, what sort of service he wants; that correct English should go to establish his position to the public. So when it comes to the sisya (disciple), it will adjust.

“Suppose your gurudeva, when you are going to take his photo, in ordinary dress he comes before the photo maker. But the sisya will, “No, no. You should stand in this posture; with this dress you must take the photo.” Do you follow?

“Assembly: Yes.

“Tamala-krsna Maharaja: Very clear, very clear.

“Srila Sridhara Maharaja: So, in language also, gurudeva gives the main point, but the language, if it is a little faulty, faulty to the public, the sisya will come: “No, this should be couched in good language.” That is not harmful. Do you follow?

“Assembly: Yes.

“Srila Sridhara Maharaja: So, in Sanskrit, what your Guru Maharaja has told, “Namo sarasvata,” small these things, you say. I can’t follow whether it is correct grammatically, but it will be your duty, according to my opinion, to couch it well with the language. And that will be the greatest service, service of higher quality. And to say that “Dictionary should be corrected and the grammer should be corrected, what my guru has said.” But practically, that will be kanisTha-adhikari service; the lower sisya, the lower status service....To explain his prestige and position, you will dress him in good dress.”

In addition, we may omit certain portions of the sound files for the following reasons:

1. A discussion is going on with Srila Gurudeva devotees but with no audible participation on his part. He may have been nodding “yes” or shaking his head “no,” but because he was not speaking, we could not reference his words. Somebody might have asked a question and somebody else might have answered it, but if Srila Gurudeva did not give his audible input, we did not include those devotees’ conversations.
2. If somebody asked Srila Gurudeva a question and somebody else rephrased that question to him, we may not include this rephrasing.
3. Sometimes, after Srila Gurudeva said something, someone else might repeat some part of that. Mostly, we did not include this repetition.
4. If somebody asked Srila Gurudeva a question and there was no audible answer, then we did not include that person’s question.
5. When Srila Gurudeva engaged in friendly conversation with someone, everyone within hearing and seeing range could feel something of the transcendental love of God emanating from his being. They were overwhelmed by his friendliness, care, concern, and compassion, and they received spiritual benefit from his mere presence. In spite of the obvious transcendental value of these darsanas to those present, if the conversations were not instructive philosophically or practically, we

may omit them.

We readily admit our own imperfections in the matter of hearing and editing the transcendental words of our beloved Gurudeva, Srila Narayana Gosvami Maharaja. We pray to our respected readers to forgive any errors made in transcribing, editing, and in the overall presentation, and invite you to communicate your findings and corrections to us. We encourage you all to visit the magnificent archive of sound and video recordings of Sri Srimad Bhaktivedanta Narayana Gosvami Maharaja. (See www.purebhakti.tv for free downloading and online hearing, or www.purebhakti.com/gvp for submitting correction suggestions.)

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not take this opportunity to give our profound thanks to Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Gosvami Maharaja's servant, Sripada Bhaktivedanta Madhava Maharaja, and Srila Gurudeva's secretary, Sripada Brajanath prabhu, for their graciousness in facilitating, since the beginning, all of our editorial questions.

Praying for the mercy of
Sri Hari, Guru, and Vaisnavas,
Syamarani dasi and the Editorial Team,

Oà Visnupada Sri Srimad Bhaktivedanta
Narayana Gosvami Maharaja's tirobhava-tithi,

