

## Taking Credit Where Credit's Due

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The revised and enlarged edition of the Bhagavad-gita As It Is (BGAI), as published by the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT) 1983, disregards the academic community's protocols or standards governing the revised editions of the books. According to the guidelines now widely accepted and practiced by publishers and academicians, the names of editors and co-authors of such newly revised editions are to be included along with dates. This distinguishes such a 2nd **edition** from a publication which is only a second **printing** of an author's original first edition.

A controversy was created because Srila Prabhupada, the author, was not present to consult with or personally authorize a re-edit of the book, which was first published as an unabridged, "complete edition" in 1972 by the Macmillan Company. From 1972 until 1977, the year Srila Prabhupada passed away, the book had been constantly studied by his disciples, widely distributed to the public and often favorably reviewed. During this time there were no proposals from anyone, nor an explicit authorization from Srila Prabhupada to revise the book then or in the future.

The editors of the 1983, 2nd edition, attempt to circumvent their lack of direct or **explicit** authorization from Srila Prabhupada by assuming and asserting that his authorization was **implicit** in his verbal and written approval of Jayadvaita Brahmachari's editorial work -- although during Srila Prabhupada's time there was no expectation that Jayadvaita or anyone else would be extensively re-editing the BGAI in the future. Srila Prabhupada had noted only a few, easily rectified changes to be made in the book. Had a proposal been made to him in 1977 (the sixth year of its publication) for an extensive revision, it wouldn't be very hard to imagine the strength of his refusal. There would be nothing equivocal about it, especially in the light of his remarks during his now famous "rascal editor" discussion recorded June 22, 1977 in Vrindavan, just five months before his disappearance.

In fact, it was Srila Prabhupada himself who created an issue about changes then being made to his books without his permission and the possibility of it happening in the future. He wanted his disciples to resolve the issue during his presence. There was no controversy, or two sides to the issue; it was a major problem to be solved and a future disaster to be avoided. Actually, since 1975 Srila Prabhupada had been giving periodical hints, guidelines and instructions along these lines to his BBT Trustee and production manager in Los Angeles and the artists as well. Unfortunately, such information was not carefully compiled, passed on or seriously implemented after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance. Without such important

guidelines in place, editors and trustees have gradually filled the gap with policies and standards which have become controversial, especially regarding the editing of books and paintings published during Srila Prabhupada's lifetime. (See *The Change Disease and Windows to the Spiritual Sky*).

Since an extensive revision of the BGAI was actually published in 1983, there has been and will continue to be a disagreement about it amongst Srila Prabhupada's followers and admirers. But what is to be avoided, and what Srila Prabhupada wanted to avoid, is controversy about his books amongst the general public, especially the scholars, educators, librarians, et. al. Opinions from intelligent people regarding his books were important to Srila Prabhupada and should not be minimized as only the complicated prejudices and speculations of so-called "non-devotees". With this in mind, the ongoing controversy may be examined here a bit more from the viewpoint of academia, at the same time keeping out in front the main objective of propagating, perpetuating and protecting Srila Prabhupada's teachings.

According to the current Chicago Manual of Style, if 20% of a first edition has been revised, it becomes a second edition -- not just a second printing -- requiring the date and names of the editors. Additionally, to quote from the Modern Language Association's Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing: "The publisher when planning a new edition of the work, may obtain revisions from a third party expert if the author refuses to make them or disagrees about their necessity... the contract... should provide that the original author and the revising author be given separate credits." Of course the BBT editors assert that they were not new authors of the book, but merely bringing it closer to the original author's words as referenced in available fragmental recordings or transcripts. The predominating difference is, obviously, that Srila Prabhupada was not present to consult with or agree or disagree. Nevertheless, whatever lends more weight to a closure or sealing of the book from further editing is in order. Following the prevailing academic protocols in the next printing would set a precedent signaling more finality than the present practice of editorial anonymity.

As is the cases of the Bible and Koran, over time sectarian scriptures are extensively revised. In the case of the Bhagavad-gita, there are already dozens of them in different languages, all edited according to various authors' and editors' preferences and personal philosophies of life. Unlike the Bible and Koran, the Bhagavad-gita truly presented as it is by Srila Prabhupada is universal, which makes it even more subject to spectacular speculations. Interestingly, although the Bible has gone through many variations, or versions, the King James version is the most widely accepted as authoritative.

Similarly, it is imperative that the BGAI remains center stage as the most complete,

definitive version. In this connection, it would be naive to assume that in one or two hundred years BBT editors could not fall prey to the change disease, perhaps in response to social or cultural demands. Therefore, a permanent sealing or closing of further editing of the BGAI must be attempted, even though the extensive revision of that book is already a strong precedent. Besides, it won't be long according to present copyright law, about forty-five years, when the BGAI will be in the "public domain". By that time it must be considered to be the most authoritative, above all other renditions. Ultimately, the BGAI is designed and destined to be the most universally accepted scripture in the world. Translated from the English, it was printed in numerous languages during Srila Prabhupada's time. The English edition remains the most important because English is fast becoming the equivalent of the world's second language. In any country, especially amongst the more educated, people are fluent in English.

Initially, the BBT's 1983 edition included the phrase "revised and enlarged" in place of "complete edition" originally found beneath the title on the face page of the first or 1972 edition. Also the "Note On the 2nd Edition" was previously included in the revised edition, wherein the editors took credit for their work and explained their qualifications and purposes in rendering the revision, although they remained anonymous. But the editing continues, and the above items were edited out in later printings. The later printings also omitted Professor Dimock's Forward, although the same literary reviews as well as Srila Prabhupada's 1971 signature at the end of his Preface are carried over from the original 1972 edition to subsequent 1983 versions. Almost all of the illustrations from that 1st edition have been gradually eliminated or replaced and there are many changes and additions to the original text throughout the book. In other words, there is no doubt the 2nd edition meets the academic criteria for being genuinely designated as a new edition.

A reader of that revised edition might notice that there is no endorsement or acknowledgement by the original author, which is often found in such a scholarly publication. But such a reader would have no way of learning that the author, Srila Prabhupada, had passed away in 1977, since there is no such indication in a section "about the author", or other biographical information. The original first edition reviews from "some of the world's leading scholars" are reprinted in the second edition, explaining the special significance of the book and the outstanding qualifications of the author, as if he were still present and endorsing the revised edition.

Be that as it may, Srila Prabhupada's present pristine reputation as authoritative author must be preserved. As he cautioned in Vrindavan on July 17, 1977, four months before his disappearance: "And people are recognizing that I am great. Don't make me small." Now, with Srila Prabhupada-vani in the shape of the Bhagavad-gita As It Is, we are blessed with

the most definitive single volume of essential spiritual knowledge published in the West since the invention of the printing press. And Srila Prabhupada has proven to be the greatest world-wide exponent of Krsna consciousness. Actually, Srila Prabhupada is already famous all over the universe, as documented by the visitation of Lord Brahma and Narada Muni, both of whom came to attend evening aratis when Radha-Londonisvara were installed in 1969. This has been confirmed by Sriman Padmalocana das, who was instructed by His Divine Grace to make two small vyasanas for the altar in anticipation of their continuing visits. It remains the task of his followers to assure His Divine Grace's spotless fame spreads here on Earth.

The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust is named after Srila Prabhupada because it is responsible to present his unalloyed teachings to the world. As the BBT continues to claim not only to be the bona fide publishers of Srila Prabhupada's books but of books by other genuine Vaisnava authors as well, they will come under closer scrutiny from professionals and general readers alike. So the standards set by the publishing and academic communities should be taken seriously and followed, because Srila Prabhupada was always concerned that his books be respected in learned circles as up to standard.

Considering the current editors' obvious confidence and conviction in their ongoing work, their somewhat mysterious policy of anonymity appears unnecessary, even contradictory. Yet, by following the standard etiquette or protocols widely in practice as mentioned hereinbefore, any apparent mystery is solved. Such an endorsement would be similar to acknowledgements found in the previous publications listed below:

1. Mukunda-Mala-Stotra, subtitled The Prayers of King Kulasekhara, published by the BBT in 1992, 157 pages, under Srila Prabhupada's name "And His Disciples".
2. Narada-Bhakti-Sutra, subtitled The Secrets of Transcendental Love, published by the BBT in 1991 and 1997, 213 pages, 10,000 copies. Authored by His Divine Grace "And His Disciples".
3. The last Cantos, 10th, 11th and 12th, of the BBT's Srimad Bhagavatam, authored "by disciples of" His Divine Grace. The names of the editors are listed following the face page.
4. The Bhagavad-gita As It Is, the Macmillan Company abridged edition of 1968, with Preface by Rayarama Brahmachary (Raymond Marais), designated as the editor.

The last example was personally approved by Srila Prabhupada. (Please note the quotation from Rayarama's Preface at the end of this essay). So the precedent is there for Srila

Prabhupada's disciples to acknowledge when their input is integrated into his books, sometimes as editors, sometimes as authors, but always as assistants or subordinates. Because no disciple, no matter how advanced, can be a hidden co-author with Srila Prabhupada. Such equality is not possible.

Presently the Movement continues to be chronicled by a number of parties, especially as more and more information becomes available on the Internet. According to Statcounter.com, a large web traffic analysis company, there are over two and a half billion Internet users worldwide, 70% of whom use the Net everyday, representing a 566% increase from 2000 to 2013. So far, as an author, Srila Prabhupada has personally escaped serious criticism and his reputation remains intact. However, every precaution can be followed to maintain the continuous good reputation of Srila Prabhupada-vani, especially his books. We look forward to the day when Srila Prabhupada will be so famous that people will clamour for his books. No doubt the BBT should have that expectation, as it's influence and recognition increases as a respected publishing house. Reputation is important. The reputation of the Macmillan Company, both in the US and England and its endorsement of Srila Prabhupada's BGAI was a major selling point, especially for the BBT Library Party and the college preaching programs.

So it is imperative that any dispute over the authenticity of books published by the BBT or its licensee, Krsna Books, Inc. (KBI), not be in public doubt. One certain way to help the reputation of the BBT as an authentic publishing house, as well as quell some devotee criticism, would be to comply with protocols recognized by the academic community, such as those outlined in the Modern Language Association (MLA) Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing and the Chicago Manual of Style. In this connection, we are again reminded how Srila Prabhupada was always concerned about how his books were to be viewed by the scholarly community. The protocols currently in customary practice, as mentioned herein, are not at all contrary to Srila Prabhupada's publishing policies. This is demonstrated, for example, by his approval of Rayarama's credentials as the bona fide editor of the abridged BGAI. Indeed that publication, along with the Preface by Rayarama, was reprinted by the BBT in 2002. This example, as well as the others, suggests that the editors take credit for their work. There is no need to continue the anonymity.

As far as ISKCON members are concerned, the editors are confident that most of them will choose to read the revised edition. The general public deserves the same option; in other words, to be informed that the second edition is a different one from the first. The editors should also be confident that the general public will also prefer a new, revised and enlarged edition. Otherwise, does not continued

anonymity imply the editors' lack of such confidence, leading them to appear surreptitious, like hidden co-authors? Of course, when it comes to Srila Prabhupada's books, no one has a right to an extensive anonymous editing of a completed manuscript, anymore than Rayarama did when he extensively abridged the original manuscript for publication in 1968.

Unlike the examples herein of disciples finishing something which Srila Prabhupada had started, the 1983 BGAI is a thorough re-editing of a book Srila Prabhupada considered completed during his lifetime. He acknowledged only some errors and no one proposed anything more. Therefore, the editors of the revised 2nd edition are obligated to take credit where credit is due.

Controversies can take on a life of their own and both the 1st and 2nd editions of the BGAI are going on. But there is a difference. The first edition, still in print, clearly states it to be licensed by the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust and "is a reproduction of the book first published by Collier Books and the Macmillan Company in 1972". This statement meets the standard protocols. Whereas the 1983 edition is now identified merely as a current printing of a "2nd edition", without noting it to be revised (or enlarged), yet still includes the 1972 copyright of the 1st edition. There is no mention of the editors who did the revision or that there ever was one. This is not at all standard procedure and should include the normal protocols in the next printing. Besides protocols there are copyright laws also. Compliance will avoid any potential for Srila Prabhupada as an author, or his books to be marginalized, sidelined, or mixed up with categories of mundane books of dubious value.

Afterall, the people in general are the true beneficiaries of this Movement and the preliminary benediction from Srila Prabhupada has been the Bhagavad-gita As It Is, his most widely printed, distributed, reviewed, read and quoted book. And come what may in this hell-bent world -- enchanted by electronics and manipulated by corporate cyber-space cadets-- fortunately, one needs only some daylight or candlelight to read Srila Prabhupada's transcendental books!

It won't be long before Srila Prabhupada's Bhagavad-gita will be in the public domain. Well before that happens, we want Srila Prabhupada to be recognized as the only truly authentic authorized translator and commentator. Hare Krsna.

actually since this was  
written, it has come to  
light through Rameswar  
that they did bring some  
changes to Sri Prabhupada  
which he OK'd. If this is  
true there must be a document  
which contains these proposed changes, as  
they would have been presented to SP written  
down most certainly. If this document  
cannot be produced, there can be no validity  
given to this story. In any event,  
Rameswar states that the editor did,  
indeed, ventured far far beyond  
what those proposed edits were supposed  
to be, and if the story can be  
verified, only those actually OK'd by SP  
are acceptable.