

Grateful for a Good Reply

By Arundhati devi dasi

I had been working in the Russian BBT as a translator of Srila Prabhupada's books for about seven years. Then I had the fortune to meet Srila Narayana Maharaja in Vrindavan at Kartika time, and I was very impressed. Before that time I was quite innocent about any propaganda in any direction. Later, however, I began to hear about the internationally distributed emails, snail-mail publications, faxes, and papers posted on many temple bulletin boards—which were sent by Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu—supposedly about Srila Narayana Maharaja. Many devotees were as disturbed as I was, and in our hearts we knew that the accusations were false, but we didn't know any specific facts and we didn't know what to do.

Recently, however, many of Srila Narayana Maharaja's disciples have been coming to Russia in preparation for Srila Narayana Maharaja's visit next week. A few of them were satisfying me with some good replies to the paper of Ravindra Svarupa prabhu. They also showed me a printed reply, and said that they hoped it could be posted. Personally, I was so happy with the presentation. I couldn't have imagined it done any better, and I knew of no better source of posting than VNN. VNN is famous for its balance. It is famous for presenting all sides and angles on any important philosophical and/or spiritual issue.

TO TELL THE TRUTH

Year after year ISKCON publications continue to advertise a letter, written by Ravindra Svarupa, even though it is packed with known falsehoods. This is not a philosophical rebuttal to Ravindra Svarupa's letter (which contained little, if any, philosophy), but a correction of his fraudulent historical accounts. To show the extent of the falsified information, I have merely listed it, side by side with verified descriptions of what *really* happened.

Ravindra Svarupa's collection of errors focuses on Narayana Maharaja, but I am not writing only in the Maharaja's defense. Rather, I want to stress how untrue information is spread and how sheepishly we accept. Although I can appreciate Narayana Maharaja, I do not consider myself his follower, and I do not care what stance you take regarding him. If you do not wish to associate with Narayana Maharaja, or even if you think it necessary to speak against him, it is not my concern.

What interests me is truth. Any unbiased research will show how Ravindra Svarupa indiscriminately broadcast item after item that simply did not occur. Regardless of what a person believes about Narayana Maharaja, or any other issue, carelessly advertising falsehoods to confuse people is wrong.

PRABHUPADA'S SUCCESSOR: Where has Narayana Maharaja seriously claimed to be "Srila Prabhupada's chosen successor" and the "authorized acarya of ISKCON"~ There are microphones on this man as often as they were on Srila Prabhupada. His words are constantly published in books and pamphlets and strewn over the Internet. Even if the boasts supposedly occurred in private, we should get some kind of verification. Ravindra Svarupa refers to no literature, tape or other source. This is because substantiation does not exist. Yet, he writes as if it's all taken for granted and people mindlessly accept it.

I have watched Narayana Maharaja for years. I have spent countless hours in discussion with him and his intimate confidants, and I am familiar with what he says in public and in private. I have never heard him intimate that he considers himself, or hopes to be such a successor or acarya of ISKCON. Why is it those in close touch with him know nothing about this bold claim? Ravindra Svarupa constantly refers to it as a given, and much of his criticism is based on this premise. But if Narayana Maharaja does not think himself in this position, much of Ravindra Svarupa's witch-hunt fizzles.

TARGETING ISKCON: Ravindra Svarupa says, "Narayana Maharaja's tours take him exclusively to ISKCON congregations". What ISKCON congregation is there in Maui? In Badger? In the countryside of Holland? In Eugene, Oregon? On the north shore of Oahu? Or in the majority of places he visits? Is the whole San Francisco Bay area, all of Indonesia, Singapore, etc. (where Maharaja is far from any ISKCON centers) to be considered massive "ISKCON congregations" from one border to the other?

Ravindra Svarupa suggests Narayana Maharaja has exclusively and intentionally 'targeted ISKCON congregations'. It doesn't require a lot of homework to look at Maharaja's posted travel schedule and see the obvious---Ravindra Svarupa is wrong. Maharaja actually participates very little in the scheduling of his own tours. If he gets numerous requests from devotees *in any area*, he naturally tries to visit and help them. But the bottom line is that he goes only where he's repeatedly invited, and the bulk of his stops are *not* near ISKCON centers.

Then Ravindra Svarupa suggests Narayana Maharaja is so petty that he enjoys extensive stays in Houston to pester Tamal Krsna Maharaja. Does Ravindra know Narayana Maharaja has had major heart surgery and one of the best cardiac hospitals in the world is in Houston? Does he know specialists at this hospital are treating Maharaja freely when he is in Houston? Despite this, Maharaja stays there no longer than other places on his tour. In any case, Indians living in Houston have always invited him to come: Tamal Krsna Maharaja has never been a factor.

SRILA PRABHUPADA'S SAMADHI: Narayana Maharaja brought up his participation in Srila Prabhupada's *samadhi* when people began to criticize, saying he had no connection with Srila Prabhupada at all. He does not use it to claim inheritance of Srila Prabhupada's *vyasasana*, but simply to show how Prabhupada did trust and appreciate him. Narayana Maharaja does not suggest, because of this (or for any reason), we should all submit to him as the appointed acarya. Rather, he preaches constantly that guru is known by his qualifications only.

SAHAJIYAISM: Ravindra Svarupa says Narayana Maharaja's teaching is not according to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura's and is akin to Ananta Vasudeva's or to deviant babajis'. Since his guru's own brother followed Ananta Vasudeva, Narayana Maharaja has been privy to each detail of this sad deviation. The fact is---following Srila Bhakti Prajnana Kesava Maharaja (his guru), Narayana Maharaja preaches with meticulous sastric insight *against* such *apasiddhanta*.

If you think there is truth in Ravindra Svarupa's uneducated claim, read the booklet "Sahajiyaism and Gaudiya Vaisnavism" by Narayana Maharaja. It is a poignant rebuttal to sahaiya *babajis* written exactly in the line of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. He

has also written another more technical refutation of sahajiyaism which will be available in English soon. Maharaja is famous for his standing challenges to any babajis who do not accept the version of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura. I have seen them literally run in fear when he comes to the Radha Kunda area.

Ravindra Svarupa claims Narayana Maharaja "did not get (what he preaches) from Bhakti Prajnana Kesava Maharaja (his own guru)". But, if Narayana Maharaja's thinking is so different from his own guru, why have every one of Srila Kesava Maharaja's many disciples respected him as one of their gurudeva's foremost devotees and preachers for almost sixty years? Does Ravindra Svarupa know the mind of Kesava Maharaja better than these intimate disciples do? Obviously he knows little about this topic.

The lynchpin of Ravindra Svarupa's accusations rides on his theory that Narayana Maharaja was contaminated by Vrindavan babajis he met while AWOL from his own guru. The only thing Ravindra could possibly be referring to is the short time Maharaja spent in Govardhana over 40 years ago. This was to avoid a controversy among disciples while their guru, Kesava Maharaja, was away from the math. A local babaji gave Maharaja a place to stay where he waited for Srila Kesava Maharaja's instruction. Naturally, he is thankful for the kindness this man offered, but nothing resembling a siksa relationship ever existed. Kesava Maharaja soon sent for Narayana Maharaja to return to Kesavaji Math in Mathura and resume his services, which he immediately did. End of story. Although Ravindra Svarupa wildly speculates otherwise, Narayana Maharaja has never, then or at any time, accepted a babaji as siksa guru, "rasika guru" or anything like it. There are no facts to back up such a foolish accusation.

PREACHING vs. NIRJANA BHAJANA: Narayana Maharaja does not, as Ravindra Svarupa puts it, "find a great deal of difference between the preaching activities of the sankirtan movement on the one hand and the activities of solitary bhajana on the other." USE SOME SENSE! If he did, why would he spend the greater part of his own life (especially the latter part which is usually reserved for bhajana) in active service, tireless traveling, writing books and preaching? If he believed as Ravindra accuses, why does he engage his own followers in active seva and preaching and not nirjana bhajana?

Neither does Narayana Maharaja "dismiss book distribution as an inferior activity". Like Srila Prabhupada, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and all others throughout our line, Narayana Maharaja says that, without developing pure consciousness, no activity is a free ticket back to Godhead. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Thakur writes in his Upadesvali: "Preaching without proper behavior is merely karma-yoga." Srila Prabhupada confirmed this over and over again: "If we are selling the book but we do not know what is inside the book, that will be a farce." (ltr 6/16/72). He said, "That is our mission, to deliver the world by preaching Krsna's message, but even higher realization, the highest realization, is to save yourself." (ltr 1/9/73).

It takes a little attention span to grasp some of Narayana Maharaja's points; one or two lines will not do. His warning is about the pitfall of becoming mundane and prideful over preaching accomplishments and losing one's own Krsna consciousness altogether. In reminding us of this, he is not guilty of the diabolical sabotage Ravindra Svarupa tries to blame on him. Maharaja's stance is not intended to discourage, but to encourage preaching on a more pure and successful level.

TRICKERY: Ravindra Svarupa accuses Narayana Maharaja of trickery and dishonesty. He uses a single example of Maharaja saying he was "locked out" of the Houston temple.

What Ravindra does not know is that Maharaja is referring to the second year he went to Houston. The Houston temple hosted Maharaja on his first year's visit, as described by Ravindra. No one has ever suggested otherwise. But when he arrived in Houston the second year Maharaja was told he was absolutely not welcome at the same temple. Maharaja refers to this, figuratively, as being "locked out". He was not being dishonest, but Ravindra again jumps to the worst possible conclusion without knowing the actual events.

To conclude that Narayana Maharaja's beautiful scriptural descriptions of the crookedness of the Yamuna, the Tamal tree, Krsna's threefold bending form, etc. are to justify anyone acting as a deceptive villain is sick. Ravindra Svarupa has let his suspicions run away with his common sense. No one in Narayana Maharaja's camp is asked to "learn to be crooked" in order to "qualify for Vrindavan". None of his followers feel "he is free to deceive them." Srila Prabhupada stressed the "rope/snake" idea more than Narayana Maharaja does.

WOMEN: Ravindra Svarupa's statement that Narayana Maharaja "is attended in Mathura by two "kumaris" is as absurd as suggesting Srila Prabhupada was "attended" by Govinda dasi and others. I've known the two women he is referring to for years. They are advanced devotees with impeccable Vaisnava principles. The behavior and Krsna consciousness in Kesavaji Gaudiya Math is extremely high by anyone's standard. Anyone who has spent time with Narayana Maharaja knows he is surrounded by strict brahmacaris 24 hours a day. Not only is he not left alone with women; he is rarely left alone period. When is it these two "kumaris" steal past the gauntlet of renunciates to "attend" Maharaja?

The fact is there is *nothing* resembling what Ravindra Svarupa suggests. The proof is that the doors to Kesavaji Gaudiya Math have always been wide open. Narayana Maharaja simply does not have a private life! Anyone can camp at the door to his room as long as they want, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. In half a century none of Maharaja's sannyasi peers, none of the lifelong brahmacaris throughout Gaudiya institutions, nor anyone who knows him has ever questioned his sannyasa. But Ravindra Svarupa, with no evidence, has decided Narayana Maharaja's sannyasa vows are suspect.

NO TASTE FOR GITA: If Narayana Maharaja has no taste for Bhagavad-gita, why has he dedicated years to the publication of Gita commentaries by Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura and Bhaktivinoda Thakura? If he has no taste for Puri why does he spend weeks in Puri every year, and why is Jagannatha worshiped on the altar in his Math? If he has no taste for Rama, why does he routinely tell inspiring Rama-lila? And if he has no taste for Narasimha why does he regularly teach Prahlada-carita, chant Narasimha mantras and celebrate Narasimha Caturdasi in great jubilation? Hundreds of devotees have seen all these things repeatedly. But without seeing a thing, Ravindra Svarupa draws his conclusions from hearsay and spot quotes without the context of Narayana Maharaja's real teachings and personal example.

LOWER-LEVEL GURU : Ravindra Svarupa accuses Narayana Maharaja of "claiming that Prabhupada was, in effect, a lower-level guru". Once again, why doesn't anyone ask the simple question---Where did Ravindra get this idea? No quotes. No evidence. Nothing! Actually, the opposite is true. Narayana Maharaja says that, while Srila Prabhupada carefully gave basic philosophy and vidhis, he also gave the highest siddhantas and is, himself, on the highest level of Krsna consciousness.

Here are some of Narayana Maharaja's own words describing Srila Prabhupada: "He is actually the one who fulfilled the prophecy that the holy name of Krsna would be heard and sung in every town, city and village throughout the world. We are eternally grateful for his immense and prolific contribution. It is actually not possible for me to properly praise and glorify him, for he was following the path of *raganuga-bhakti* at the topmost level of madhurya-rasa. This level is extremely difficult to ascertain and understand. Human beings who manifest characteristics of this nature are extremely rare and their true natures (not the ones we see, but their true natures), which they themselves cover, are extremely esoteric and not to be comprehended by the mundane mind and intelligence." (Narayana Maharaja lecture in Vrndavana, India)

Is this a description of a "lower-level guru"? Obviously, Ravindra Svarupa knows little about how Narayana Maharaja thinks or speaks. In his accusations, Ravindra continually fumbles for something that doesn't exist.

Why has Ravindra done this twisting? Maybe he is the dupe of lies he was fed. If not, his integrity is seriously in question (along with any who repeat such unsophisticated rumors).

Lastly, I hope readers will understand---I am not writing only about a person, but a principle. *Reckless use of misinformation is the point, not my feelings or your feelings about Narayana Maharaja.* Ravindra Svarupa's letter is merely a case in point in which an author makes a significant mistake by publishing things he doesn't know about. It is time for careful research, accuracy and truth to guide us, especially as we publicly discuss the character of Vaisnavas. Whatever our opinion about Narayana Maharaja *or any topic*, it should not be based on phony information.