

The Will o' the Whispers

The now infamous "poison whispers" make up a large part of the so-called evidence in support of the conspiracy theory. These are found primarily on the conversation tapes of the 10th November, 1977. In fact, the whole poison controversy began when some devotees heard whispers on these tapes that sounded like references to poison.

We talked to Jack Mitchell who did the original analysis for Nityananda Das. The first point we discussed was that in many of the whispers, the spectrographic analysis only picks up fragments of the words that are claimed to be present. For example, in the supposedly whispered phrase, "Push real hard, it's going down," many of the syllables were described as "cannot be determined" in the spectrographic analysis. Below is a summary of the analysis of this phrase.

push

*/p/ exact point cannot be determined, but there is some evidence of /p/ energy
/u/ energy cannot be determined
/sh/ energy is clearly defined.*

real

*no specific syllables found, but analysis shows tongue trajectory consistent with the word real.
/r/ no evidence
/ea/ consistent with syllable
// no evidence*

hard

*/h/ energy burst consistent with frication
/ar/ no evidence
/d/ some evidence, but aural evidence more revealing
believed to be there but not shown on spectrograph
/t's/ clearly evident.*

going

*/g/ clearly evident
/oing/ cannot be determined.*

down

*/d/ clearly evident
/ow/ analysis shows downward motion consistent with /ow/
/n/ no information could be extracted*

(It was not possible to confirm the number of syllables in the phrase due to speaking amplitude and the noise amplitude being close.)

So out of 16 elements of speech analysed above, the figures are as follows:

Clearly defined 4
Some evidence 2
Reading "consistent with" phrase 3
No evidence 7

Therefore there is no evidence at all for almost half the syllables, while another 5 show readings that are only "consistent with" or show "some evidence" of the sounds that are being looked for. This leaves only 4 syllables out of 16 that are clearly defined by the spectrograph.

Jack explained that this means these syllables have to be judged according to the aural evidence, which means in plain language that a person listening to the tapes decides what the whispers actually are. This introduces a degree of subjectivity into the analysis that is not at first apparent when we see the impressive spectrum analyses that decorate Nityananda's book.

While talking with Jack it became clear that he was convinced there is something to the poison theory, and he also believes that his evidence is very important to the case. In other words, he has a predisposition to hearing things in a particular way i.e. that the "whispers" are incriminating evidence of a murder.

It is clear from Jack's own report that he was specifically looking for words relating to poison, as we can see from his report of April 26, 1998.

2:23.646 - Very low amplitude anomaly, sound like the word "poison" but is actually an audio illusion.

Therefore we should be careful to accept the CAE analysis alone as definite proof of a conspiracy. Due to the highly subjective nature of the whispers and the low percentage of verifiable syllables, we certainly cannot pin an entire case on this slim evidence, especially in light of the lack of any other demonstrable proof that Srila Prabhupada was administered poison.

Yet, even if we accept that some of the whispers found by Jack Mitchell are genuine, the next question would be, "Is there any logical explanation for the presence of these whispers on the tapes at those particular points." In all of the cases documented by Nityananda, this question can be answered in the affirmative. Below are some examples and how these correspond in a perfectly logical way to the conversations that were being held at the time.

In the tape of November 10, the following whispers were allegedly found:

"He's gonna die."
 "Listen, he's saying... going to die."
 "Yes, a heart attack time."

When we first read this passage we may be shocked as to why such whispers are present on the tapes, and certainly Nityananda Das insinuates the worst possible interpretation relating to a plot to poison Prabhupada. However, before jumping to any conclusions, let's take a look at the conversations from that day.

On November 10th the kaviraja and Prabhupada's disciples were all trying to convince him not to go on a bullock cart parikrama of Vrindavan. The disciples were very concerned that Prabhupada may not survive if he attempted such a parikrama in his weak state. The kaviraja was very adamant that Prabhupada should not go, and even went so far as to say that he thought Prabhupada would have a heart attack if he did go on parikrama.

Kaviraja: [All the road is broken. He will get jolted around and the heart will not be able to tolerate jolts. This decision should be given up. O! such big holes that even our

heart shake wherever the vehicles land and what to speak of inside a bullock-cart.]
 Hansaduta: We have to consider...
 Kaviraja: [It is not even tolerable, will not last even for fifteen minutes.]

The same thing was confirmed later in the day.

Tamal Krishna: (referring to kaviraja) He said within an hour or two hours, the bouncing and jumbling of the bullock cart will cause a heart attack. Just like you were having heart..., a little heart spasm the other day, just laying in bed two days ago. He says this going in a bullock cart, up and down, within one, two hours it can cause heart attack. Better that you live for six or seven years productively than that you go on this parikrama and die within two hours gloriously.

In fact, the whisper found at 21:58 on tape 771110 side A, which allegedly says, "Listen he's saying... going to die," comes immediately after the kaviraja appeals to Prabhupada not to go on the parikrama. The conversation is becoming more and more intense as Prabhupada's disciples are trying to convince him not to go on parikrama because of the risk to his health. Then the kaviraja again desperately appeals to Prabhupada in Hindi. Only a few seconds after the kaviraja has finished, one can hear a disciple urgently whisper to another, "Listen he's saying... going to die". After listening to the tape it is obvious that this is a totally innocuous event related directly to what is being said at the time. That Nityananda doesn't mention this fact is certainly an injustice and another example of him conveniently leaving aside the truth in an attempt to promote his own cause.

I asked Jack Mitchell why he didn't care to mention this fact. He replied that he was paid only to identify the whispers, but was not employed to put them into context. When we do put them into context however, we see that there is nothing strange about them, and rather than indicate some sinister plot, these whispers simply confirm the topics discussed by Prabhupada's entourage on the 10th of November. Namely, that His Divine Grace was not in a fit state to attempt a parikrama of Govardhana by bullock cart, and that the kaviraja held real fears that he would have a heart attack and die if he did go on parikrama.

Now let's take a look at the "poison whispers" found on the recordings from the same tape marked 771110. The audible portion of the tape contains many references to poison in the ordinary course of the conversation. In fact there is a very lengthy conversation between the kaviraja and Prabhupada's disciples on the matter. It is therefore no surprise that his disciples were talking about the issue and that the word "poisoning" would be present on the tapes of this period.

Because the word "poison" had been mentioned many times in that particular days' conversation, there is really no mystery as to why the same word would also be found in whispers.

The infamous "Poison's going down" whisper and the "Poisoning for a long time", are both from the same tape of November 10th. Is it merely a coincidence that these whispers are found on that day's tape? No. The two are clearly related and represent portions of that day's actual conversations, which were totally innocent.

Armed with this knowledge we must reject the so-called "whispers evidence" as invalid. Firstly, the technical analysis is subjectively based on the hearer's ability to put certain sounds together to make coherent phrases, and secondly, on each occasion the "incriminating" whispers were found, we also find corresponding conversations about the same topics in normal speech.

These whispers show no hidden agenda, rather they show Srila Prabhupada's loving disciples trying their utmost to prolong his stay with them, and serve him to the best of their ability in his final days.

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