

Is the Poison Allegation True?

By Caitanya Charan January 5, 2011

Question: Some people claim that Srila Prabhupada was poisoned. Is it true? If not, why not?

Answer: The claim is patently false. Here's a brief overview followed by the detailed answer.

Overview:

The Allegation

Nityananda das (Niko Kyut), a Prabhupada initiate expelled from ISKCON, is the author of a Self-published 408-page book— designated, weirdly, on cover and title page as “a letter”—with the title “Someone Has Poisoned Me: The Facts About Srila Prabhupada’s Poisoning By Arsenic.” In this bloated book, the author purports to demonstrate conclusively that Srila Prabhupada was assassinated by gradual and deliberate arsenic poisoning. Subsequently a poison CD (referred henceforth as PCD) was circulated in the ISKCON world, which claims to prove the same thing.

Refutations:

Logical

- 1) Who exactly would want to kill Srila Prabhupada and what would be their motive? Some proponents of the “Ritvik” idea of guruship have postulated that some members of the GBC who were named by Srila Prabhupada in his letter of July 9, 1977 wanted him removed from the scene as quickly as possible so that they could become full gurus in their own right rather than be proxies for Srila Prabhupada. According to their logic, Srila Prabhupada was about to state that he didn’t want his disciples to be full gurus, and to prevent this and thus fulfill their own ambitions, they poisoned him to death. Obviously such a task couldn’t be the work of just one devotee. There would have to have been a conspiracy. An astute observer would have to ask how is it possible to keep a conspiracy like that tight without any leaks for 20 years, especially in ISKCON? And if there was a conspiracy, how was it possible to keep Bhakti Caru Swami out of it, for, in the final days, he administered all the food and medicine that was given to Srila Prabhupada? He would have had to be in on it. But what would be his motive? He was not one of the originally appointed gurus nor did he become one until after the guru reforms in 1987.
- 2) In his last days Srila Prabhupada was very keen that he be taken on a parikrama around Vrindavana. But the devotees who were nursing him pleaded with Srila Prabhupada not to go.

Now, if the Kaviraja assured the devotees that Srila Prabhupada would indeed not survive a bullock cart ride, and if these devotees wanted Srila Prabhupada dead, what could be more convenient than letting him go on a parikrama and in this way speed up his death by entirely natural causes, rather than risk discovery in a poison plot? This would be logical and risk-free.

Medical:

1) Diabetes or arsenic? :

The surgeon who operated on SP in London in 1977 confirms that SP’s health problems were due to diabetes: “Srila Prabhupada first presented to me in the emergency room of Watford General Hospital in 1977. He was in

obviously poor health and showed signs of renal failure and was found to be diabetic. These diagnoses were made on clinical suspicion confirmed by blood and urine analysis. His most obvious problem on admission was urinary retention. This was caused by a most unusual degree of phimosis. That is a long-standing scarring and thickening of the foreskin such that he was by the time of his admission virtually unable to pass urine. This process would have taken many years to develop and during that time could well have produced backpressure enough to result in renal problems – as more often happens with prostatic obstruction. I remember him as an amazingly calm and stoical person. He refused to be admitted to hospital and I am sure he would not have withstood a general anaesthetic. Somehow we persuaded him to have a circumcision to relieve the problem, which I carried out in the ER under local anaesthetic. He made a good recovery from this and was able to pass urine normally following the procedure. Unfortunately his renal failure was by that time well advanced and irreversible, caused by a combination of diabetes and phimosis. I hope this is of some help.” – Andrew J McIrvine FRCS Consultant Surgeon

The only symptoms of arsenicosis which Srila Prabhupada displayed (gastro-intestinal upset and multi-organ failure) are those which are nonspecific and common to many other systemic diseases, most notably diabetes. The distinct lack of any of the symptoms specifically associated with arsenic poisoning (hyperkeratosis, raindrop pigmentation, sub-acute polyneuropathy, Mees’ lines) throws grave doubt on the hypothesis that Prabhupada was actually suffering from arsenicosis. We also find that there is significant and compelling evidence, based on the clinical record and testimony of doctors who personally treated him, that he was suffering primarily the

symptoms of advanced diabetes, which, having gone untreated for decades, led to further complications, most notably coronary heart disease and kidney failure. In contrast, the theory that he was poisoned with arsenic is utterly baseless and is not substantiated by the medical evidence in any way whatsoever. – David R. Hooper B.Sc (biochem.) (Deva Gaura Hari Das)

2) Hair Analysis shows no signs of poisoning

Nityananda das has claimed that Prabhupada’s hair levels were recorded at 3ppm and that this represents solid evidence that “undoubtedly Srila Prabhupada was maliciously poisoned.”

Scientific facts about arsenic in hair:

- 1) Arsenic is the twentieth most abundant element in the earth’s crust.
- 2) The real figure for the testing of Prabhupada’s hair sample was NOT 3ppm arsenic but 2.6ppm.
- 3) Scientific studies have shown levels of 4.8ppm (Mexico City) and 3.0ppm (Glasgow) average arsenic content of hair in normal (unexposed) populations.
- 4) Research proves that persons who are malnourished exhibit a 50% increase in the concentration of trace metals in their hair, due to slowing of hair growth while the rate of metal deposition remains constant.
- 5) By far the major source of elimination of arsenic is through the kidneys and urine. One would expect elevated levels of these toxins in the blood and hair of a person suffering serious kidney malfunction.
- 6) Forensic pathologists agree that even high levels of arsenic cannot on their own be accepted as proof of poisoning without specific clinical symptoms of arsenic poisoning.

- 7) Hair analysis for arsenic is a very unreliable indicator of serum arsenic levels when a specific individual is tested without a range of reference values from a group of the same time and place for comparison.
- 8) Expert scientists who are presently working in the field of hair analysis and neutron activation agree that any amount up to 10 ppm arsenic can be considered 'normal' levels of arsenic.

Therefore Srila Prabhupada's hair samples do not show evidence of arsenic poisoning.

Srila Prabhupada statements:

Recordings missing?

PCD: There were seventy-five days between July and October, out of ninety-two, for which there are no tapes recorded, including forty-five consecutive days from August 18th through October 1st.

Tamala Krishna Goswami explains: "We kept a small Sony tape recorder by Prabhupada's bedside and turned it on whenever possible to record whatever he said. Often two or three days or more would pass before an entire tape was filled. The tape would simply be given one of these dates, though in fact what was recorded often represented many days of conversation. This would explain why there appeared to be so many "missing" dates. Furthermore, on the 26th of August, Srila Prabhupada left Vrindavana for London. While in London he underwent an operation due to a worsening condition and became almost entirely bedridden thereafter, seeing practically no one. Although his intention was to travel on to America, he instead returned to India, fearing the worst. Arriving in Bombay on the 14th of September, he entered into a crisis situation. My diary entry for the 15th of September indicates the situation: "Throughout the day Srila Prabhupada has been lying in bed. He does not speak at all and hardly moves." When I asked Prabhupada how he was feeling, His Divine Grace simply said: "Crisis." On October 1st, Prabhupada left for Vrindavana.

Obviously, this period represented days and even weeks when no recording was made.

Examining Srila Prabhupada's statements about he being poisoned

ROOM CONVERSATIONS, VRINDAVAN, NOVEMBER 8, 1977 (Conversation Book No.36)

Prabhupada: Someone says that I've been poisoned. It's possible.

Balaram Misra(?): Hmm?

Kaviraja: What is he saying?

Prabhupada: Someone says that someone has given poison.

Kaviraja: To whom?

Prabhupada: To me.

Kaviraja: Who said?

Prabhupada : All these friends.

Bhakti-caru: Who said, Srila Prabhupada?

Prabhupada: They all say.

Tamala Krsna: Krishnadas? Who said that, Srila Prabhupada?

Prabhupada: I don't know, but it is said.

???

Kaviraja: Oh, Maharaj, today, How did you say this – that someone told you that someone has poisoned

you? Did you feel something?

Prabhupada: No, not said, but when one is given poison it happens like this. It's written in book.

Kaviraj: If you take raw mercury, it can happen, or several other raw things. But who would do such a thing to you? For a saintly person like you, even if someone thinks such a thing, then he is a demon.

Tamala Krsna: Srila Prabhupada? You said before that you..., that it is said that you were poisoned?

Prabhupada: No. These kind of symptoms are seen when a man is poisoned. He said like that, not that I am poisoned.

Tamala Krsna: Did anyone tell you that, or you just know it from before?

Prabhupada: I read something.

Tamala Krsna: Ah, I see. That's why actually we cannot allow anyone else to cook for you. Srila Prabhupada: That is good.

Tamala Krsna: Jayapataka Maharaja was telling that one acharya, Sankaracharya, of the Sankaracharya line – this was a while ago – he was poisoned to death. Since that time, none of the acharyas or the gurus of the Sankaracharya line will ever take any food cooked except by their own men.

Srila Prabhupada: My Guru Maharaja also.

Tamala Krsna: Oh, you, of course, have been so merciful that sometimes you would take prasada cooked by so many different people.

Srila Prabhupada: That should be stopped (pause)

Points to be noted:

SP clearly states when asked if he had been poisoned, “These kind of symptoms are seen when a man is poisoned....not that I am poisoned.”

Bhakti Vidya Purna Swami explains the context in which these statements were made,

“Srila Prabhupada had a dream in which he saw an Ayurvedic doctor wearing Ramanuja tilak, who knew how to make a specific medicine called ‘makaradhvaja’. Srila Prabhupada was telling us that ‘makaradhvaja’ was very powerful medicine classified as a poison.

Ayurvedic medicine is divided into 3 categories. The first category is fresh or dry herbs which are considered in the mode of goodness. The second, are minerals which are considered in the mode of passion. The third, are medicinal poisons, which are considered in the mode of ignorance. If the disease is very advanced, one may have to resort to very strong medicines, like minerals or poisons. Modern allopathic medicines are also generally in the category of poisons.

In using rajasic or tamasic medicines, one must see that it properly matches the condition of a disease so that it may be useful in counteracting the advancement of the disease. Sometimes, if a disease is too advanced, the medicinal poison instead of counteracting the disease, can produce side effects with the symptoms of mild poisoning. So, after a few days, the devotees found a qualified Ayurvedic doctor who wore Ramanuja tilak in Calcutta, and had him flown to Delhi and brought to Vrindavana. Srila Prabhupada met with the doctor and they talked for a long time concerning Srila Prabhupada's condition and options for treatment. Specifically they discussed Srila Prabhupada's idea of taking ‘makaradhvaja’ medicine. Previous to the doctor's arrival, Srila Prabhupada was telling us that makaradhvaja taken with honey would rejuvenate the heart and other essential organs, and if taken with pure musk would rejuvenate one's sensual powers.

Prabhupada laughed and said naturally as a sannyasi he would take it with honey. At some point after the kaviraja's discussion with Srila Prabhupada, he mentioned to us that Srila Prabhupada had an amazingly deep understanding of the Ayurveda that even many qualified vaidyas (Ayurvedic doctors) did not have. He

told us that only someone with great knowledge of the Ayurveda could understand that ‘makaradhvaja’ would be a suitable medicine for Srila Prabhupada’s condition. The doctor was very amazed with this. In Srila Prabhupada’s discussion with the doctor, they discussed the point that the ‘makaradhvaja’ may be too strong for Srila Prabhupada’s severely deteriorated physical condition, but Srila Prabhupada insisted on trying the medicine. The doctor felt it was a correct choice, but he was worried that due to Srila Prabhupada’s overly weak condition the side effect of poisoning may manifest instead of rejuvenation. Yes, the doctor prepared the ‘makaradhvaja’ that he had brought from Calcutta and gave it to Srila Prabhupada. The next day however while Srila Prabhupada was looking at the color of the skin on his arms and noticing a blue tint, he stated, “poison”. Meaning that the ‘makaradhvaja’ instead of acting as hoped, was giving the side effect of poisoning. So after some discussion between Srila Prabhupada and the doctor, it was decided to discontinue the use of ‘makaradhvaja’ and switch to a lighter course of medicine, made up of herbs, that the kaviraja would personally collect from the local forests of Vrindavana. That medicine continued up to Srila Prabhupada’s departure.

Did SP doubt those nursing him?

No. The fact that he agreed with Tamala Krsna Goswami that only his own disciples should cook for him indicates that he did not suspect his immediate entourage of any such crime.

Poison whispers?

Let’s take a look at the actual conversations, in the background of which, the “poison whispers” (alleged whispers that supposedly leak the poison conspiracy) supposedly were to have occurred.

BBT Tape 46 side A CONVERSATIONS WITH SRILA PRABHUPADA

(beginning on page 373) Room Conversation

November 10, 1977, Vrindavana:

Bhavananda: We should begin the parikrama in Vrindavana. Srila Prabhupada: Yes.

Bhavananda: Because quite honestly, Srila Prabhupada, I think most of us are very worried. If you go off down the road and send us all back to our different assignments, we would not be able to serve with our full attention, knowing that our beloved father and spiritual guide was in such weak condition. So if we begin in Vrindavana, we’re all here now, we can see so that we know what arrangements to make for the future when you want to leave.

Srila Prabhupada: Hm. You make me flat. (break)

(Whisper #1: Poison’s (?) going down. (Giggle) Poison’s (?) going down.)

Jayapataka: We heard that Your Divine Grace had a dream that a kaviraja of the Ramanuja-sampradaya would treat you and bring you back to strength, and this kaviraja says that in a very short time, following the treatment, you would regain your strength. Although he hasn’t got all of the medicines yet, but within a day or two they’ll all be prepared, and he says within fifteen days you should be quite improved in strength. So far, he seems to have been quite sincere. Srila Prabhupada: No, no, he’s sincere. I’ll drink milk. Whatever strength is obtainable, there will be.

Jayapataka: Like to follow the same treatment, only while traveling. (Whisper #2: Let’s put poison in the milk. (?))

Hamsadutta: So we should meet and make a program for going around Vrindavana.

Srila Prabhupada: Yes.

Hamsadutta: You want to begin tomorrow morning? Srila Prabhupada: Yes.

Tamala Krsna: You sound like you are very determined to go, Srila Prabhupada.

Srila Prabhupada: Day time we expose in the sunshine, and (Whisper #3: Poison’s (?) going down..)

camp underneath a tree at night. That has to be arranged. Bhakti-caru: Srila Prabhupada, shall I offer you some milk now? Srila Prabhupada: Yes, give a little hot.

(Srila Prabhupada drinks milk)

Bhakti-caru: Is it hot enough? Srila Prabhupada: It's too sweet.

Bhakti-caru: Please wipe you hand, Srila Prabhupada. Srila Prabhupada: Inaudible.

Bhakti-caru: Would you like a little water, Srila Prabhupada? You don't want to drink water?

Srila Prabhupada: No.

Points to be noted:

The person giggling is Prabhupada's godbrother, Krishnadas Babaji Maharaja who was known to continuously giggle due to his constantly being in good humor from his incessant chanting of the Holy Name. Is it likely that such a great soul would participate in such a horrendous crime?

Neither does it make much sense to suggest that first the perpetrators whisper:

"Poison's going down (Giggle) Poison's going down," before Srila Prabhupada is even drinking the milk, and then the next moment they whisper: "Let's put poison in the milk."

Harikesha Swami comments, "'As far as the original whisper is concerned, the one that supposedly said, 'Let's not poison him and go,' we have listened to that one the most. We cannot hear the word 'poison,' nor the words 'him and go.' I cannot make out what this is saying even after putting enormous amounts of equalization and noise filtering (we did this in our studio in Korsnas where they process my tapes), but if there is anything that comes close to what is said, it is 'That's not part of the treat...milk.' Of course, this makes little sense. But definitely there is no mention of poison, as was originally ascertained. Further, it is clear that this statement is being whispered to Prabhupada himself (!), who is acknowledging what is told to him with two 'uh-huhs' or whatever it is he said.

Concerning the VNN statement that "the poison is going down (giggle), the poison is going down," we found that there is again, no mention of poison. All we could get out of that section was "ishvarya going down, ishvarya doing down." At least that is what it sounds like. Again, no "poison" there, and how they can hear the word poison is beyond us. We have no idea what "ishvarya" is. Maybe it is some medicine? As far as the statement made by Tamal Krsna Maharaja-the one behind the Hindi statements of the Kaviraja-which supposedly say something about "poison in different containers," we have got the definitive explanation of what is said, and it makes perfect sense in the context. The context is that Hansadutta has been saying that Prabhupada is a pure devotee, and if he wants to go on parikrama then they should arrange it. Tamal Krsna Goswami then says, "We're placing different opinions, that's all right," or "We're posing different opinions" (An extraneous noise makes it difficult to decide between "placing" or "posing.") Either way, this makes perfect sense. He is simply saying that it is not maya to have a different opinion, considering the weight of the situation. Please listen to this section carefully, and you will hear this or something very close to this. Again: no poison.

The other sections which were highlighted by VNN were not on the tape we had. By doing this exercise I have seen that when one has an idea in his head as to what is being said, the ears and the mind oblige us to and make us hear that very thing."

Ravindra Svarupa P states, "The so-called "'poison ishvaya rasa' whisper" is actually part of a conversation in Bengali between a Bengali speaker and Krsna dasa Babaji. The words in question turn out to be a statement entirely in Bengali. What people have heard as 'poison ishvara rasa'-or something like that-is a

Bengali speaker saying to Krsna dasa Babaji the clear phrase ‘kayek din pare asha?’ ‘Kayek din pare’ means ‘after a few days,’ and the word ‘asha’ is most likely the first part of the standard expression ‘asha kari’, ‘I hope.’ However the sentence may end, ‘kayek din pare’ is not ‘poison.’ We played the selection to three intelligent native Bengali speakers, independently of each other. All of them heard close to the same thing. According to the Bengali listeners, the speaker on the tape is saying, ‘Apne kabe jaben? Kayek din pare asha?’ This means, ‘When will you go? After a few days, I hope.’ And Krsna dasa Babaji answers, ‘Kamon?’ ‘How?’ or ‘All right.’ In context, this makes sense. Krishnadasa Babaji had just been discussing with someone in Bengali about a journey and the possible modes of transportation.”

Serious accusations are being made against intimate disciples of Srila Prabhupada on the flimsiest of evidence. After reading Ravindra Svarupa prabhu’s report, and noting the PCD statement “There are just forty phonemes which are combined together to produce every sound of the English language” we have to ask, does spectrographic sound analysis work on any language outside of English? Were the lab technicians who conducted the tests informed that the sounds they were listening to may not be in English? Would they have been so certain about the results of their analysis if they had known there was even a remote possibility that the “whispers” were not in English?

Miscellaneous:

Narrator of PCD Jagannatha Dasa “Puripada” Declares Hoax

CHAKRA (USA) – August 18, 1999: I was on the “inside” of the poison paranoia via Rochana and company since almost day one. I cowrote, narrated and produced the now infamous poison CD, talked extensively with all the pro-poison big guns and subsequently carefully went through the poorly written book by Nityananda Prabhu and I can tell you it is all false propaganda spun out to try and feed the personal agendas of the principals. In short, his devotees or anyone else did NOT poison Srila Prabhupada and no one knows it better than the self-serving spin doctors behind this most unforgivable and evil lie.”

Conclusion:

No solid evidence exists either medically or through the recorded medium to establish that Srila Prabhupada was deliberately poisoned, and certainly not by his disciples. Rather, we feel that the love of those surrounding Srila Prabhupada was genuine and self-evident. It was accepted as such by His Divine Grace and as his disciples and followers, we should have no difficulty in accepting that also. **The only genuine poison is the poison theory itself.**