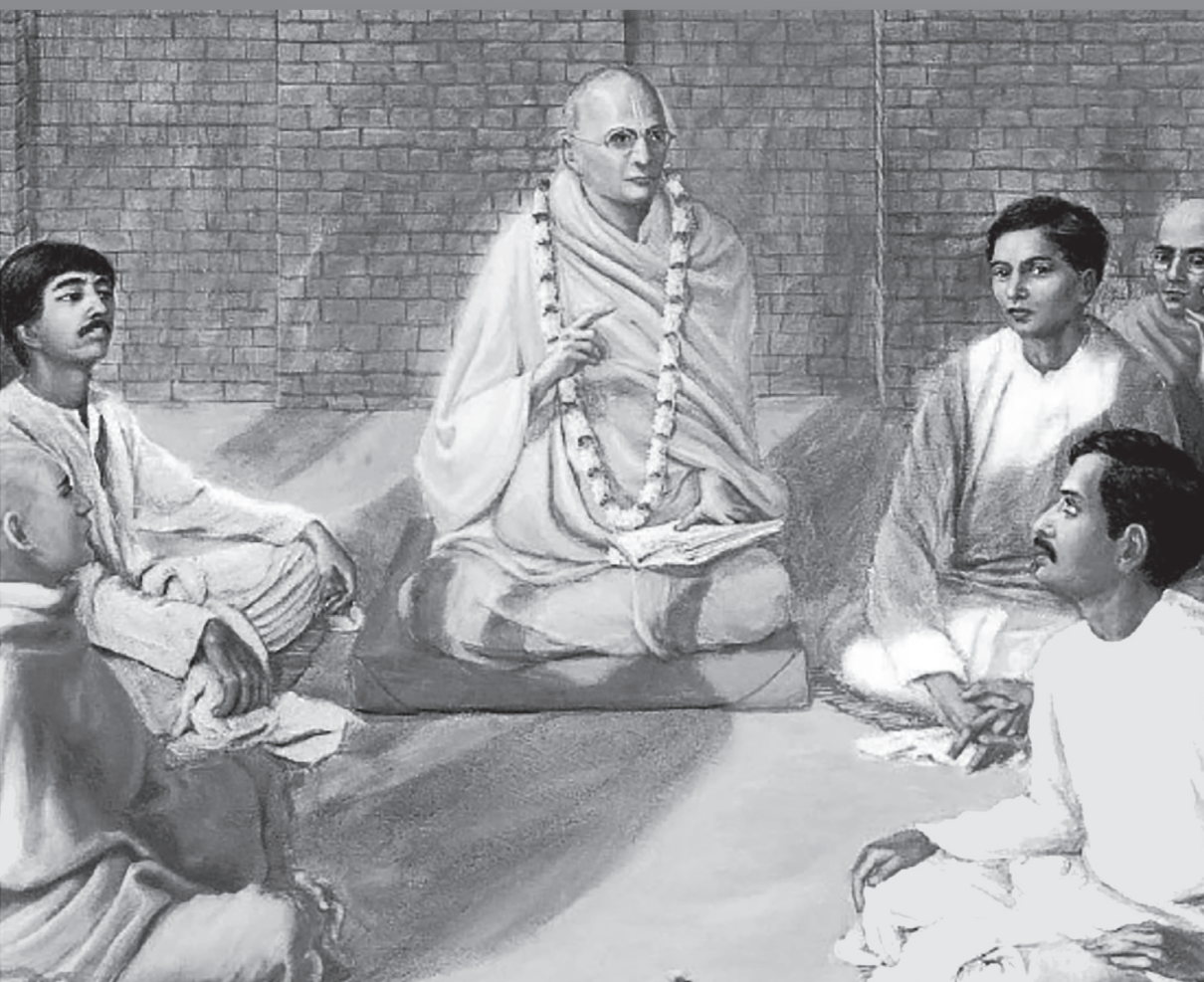


**Masters and Disciples:**  
**EDUCATIONAL PROSPECTS  
AND TRADITIONS IN INDIA**

Dialogue between professors  
Samaresh Bandyopadhyay and Ravi M. Gupta  
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## **Foreword:**

The Master and Disciple relationship constitutes one of the fundamental bases of the integral development of a human being. Within this perspective, NIOS is organizing to systematically carry out academic and cultural events, with this content throughout 2022. With these considerations, we present this dialogue, on Masters & Disciples, held for 45 minutes, professors Samaresh Bandyopadhyay and Ravi M. Gupta with investigator Hanumatpresaka Swami

## **Keywords:**

Education, Masters, Disciples, philosophy, ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, student-centered teaching, dharma.

### **Prologo:**

La relación Maestros y Discípulos, constituye una de las bases fundamentales del desarrollo integral de un ser humano. Bajo esta perspectiva, NIOS tiene programado realizar, sistemáticamente, eventos académicos, y culturales con este contenido todo el 2022. Con estas consideraciones, presentamos el dialogo que, sobre Maestros & Discípulos, sostuvieron por 45 minutos los profesores Samaresh Bandyopadhyay y Ravi M. Gupta con el investigador Hanumatpresaka Swami

### **Palabras clave:**

Educación, Maestro, Discipulo,, filosofía, estética, ética, metafísica, epistemología, enseñanza centrada en el estudiante, dharma.

**HpSwami:** Hello. Hello? I'm here with Professor Ravi Gupta, Chairman of the Department of History for Utah State University. Here in Peru we have mangoes and the sun is shining.

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Ok, I shall be happy to talk with him. No problem.

**HpSwami:** We are working on a dialog with scholars from South America about Masters and Disciples. I think it's going to be very nice. I think it's going to be a series of nice talks and then edit them, putting in pictures. And then the idea is we'll be talking here. We'll be talking later in the United States. We'll be talking when we get to Europe. And then finally, when we get with our camera crew to Nil-kamal (Professor's ancestral home) everybody will be waiting:

"Oh, my goodness. Here is Dr. Samaresh. Oh, my goodness. We've been hearing about him so much." And by then, maybe we can all go to Manipur. We'll get our own sterilized pandemic free jet airplane, go to Manipur together, Radhakund. So maybe, Professor Gupta can say hello and ask a little bit about our topic Masters and Disciples.

**Prof. Ravi M. Gupta:** Namaskar Professor, how are you?

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Very Happy to hear your voice after a long time. Namaskar.

**Prof. Ravi Gupta:** How is your health?

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Good.

**Prof. Ravi Gupta:** We're doing well here. Very happy with Maharaja's association and so many devotees in Peru, and so many nice academics. We have a dialog with philosophers, some of the key philosophers in Peru. So it's been very nice, very productive. Right now at home in Utah, we were in the middle of a blizzard of snow, heavy snowfall. And here the sun is shining and we're eating mangoes.

**HpSwami:** The overall theme of the movie is consolidation of all this different work we've been doing. Of course, a lot of that is your and my work together. So Ravi and other people are pushing to consolidate this now and look at what the good things were, what the results were, and then pass on your heritage. So that's been the theme of the movie.

We are talking with Prof. Miguel Polo, everybody else, and it's just very nice, looking back at everything. And then we're coming out with great tangible results. But as part of that, San Marcos University is still the oldest university in the Western world. The theme with them is starting off as Masters and Disciples.

Everybody is enthused. It's a good perspective. And they want to do it every two months all the way until next year. But if we get Masters and Disciples a little clarified, then that will maybe lead directly to more precise content. So, we were talking about this with Professor Gupta, if we have something like this in the West and in our Indian culture.

**Prof. Ravi Gupta:** So we're looking at this theme of masters and disciples from different perspectives. There's the traditional idea of guru and shishya, but also we were thinking of it from academic perspectives. Are there lineages of masters and disciples, PhD mentors and their students in the academic world as well? We thought that maybe you could share some of your experiences in terms of how the tradition of master and disciple was expressed and practiced in your own career. How were you impacted by masters in your life, teachers, and how have you served as mentors to so many others, in this academic context, specifically in the university? Then maybe thinking about how that has changed over time, through the years in India. I can share something of my own experience of my mentors in the academic world, in Oxford and in other places. Does this theme seem OK to you?

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Yes, it is an interesting topic. The thing is, Preceptor and Disciple is more appropriate than Master and Disciple. If it were Master and Disciple, Master would refer to the Lord himself. Guru and Shishya is Preceptor and Disciple.

**HpSwami:** We were talking about this and we realized that at least in the United States, there's really no personal teacher-student relationship through primary school, secondary, and the bachelor's degree. But yes, when you start your master's and doctorate degree, then you have a specific mentor, teacher, professor. Ravi was talking about his experience at Oxford. But as you were growing up in India, I think it was a stronger relationship between teacher and students, even like in primary school.



The Prime Minister of India Sm. Indira Gandhi receives from the Vice-Chancellor, University of Calcutta, Professor Dr. Santoshkumar Bhattacharyya (standing facing), the first copy of the *Ācārya-Vandanā (D. R. Bhandarkar Birth Centenary Volume)* for its Ceremonial Release on January 11, 1984, at Rajbhavan, Calcutta, and Presentation by her to the Editor Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay (standing to the left of Professor Dr. Bhattacharyya).  
(Photo by courtesy : Rajbhavan, Calcutta, West Bengal.)

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Yes. In fact, in every stage, primary or secondary school, the teachers who are involved in those relationships were highly revered by me. Yes, that is my experience, in my life.

**HpSwami:** But has it changed with industrialization? Is it becoming more of an impersonal relationship at the primary level and the secondary level in India?

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Well, certainly. Just to say that something has changed or nothing has changed, depends on teachers, individual cases. In fact, how impressed the student becomes, that impression he carries through all his life. So that is there, although now that Guru Sishya parampara is lost. That was there when students used to go to the teacher's house, stay there and offer services, and learn and come back, and now that relationship and that system are no longer there.

It depends on the trust in the teacher. If the teacher is impressive, he's remembered, adored and admired at every stage.

**HpSwami:** Prabhupada said one time that in traditional Indian school, when he was growing up, the students would always bring a gift every morning. "Namaste Guruji." They would bring a mango or something from home.

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Yes, now if you visit Varanasi, you will see that even if one has a teacher from 50 years ago, when the former student visits, he touches the guru's feet. "Namaste guruji, namaste, gurave namah."

**HpSwami:** When Bhakti Swarup Damodar Maharaja was in Calcutta, I was with him. We were visiting some of his teachers and he bought a case of mangoes.

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Yes, yes. That is there still. From my past, I can personally tell you, one student of mine, who is now a Minister of the Administration of Central Cabinet, I was with him for a taxi, because my driver didn't come for that day, in front of the Asiatic Society. He was returning from his office in Parliament Square, South Calcutta.

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** He saw me. He got down, came to me, touched my feet. We had discussions. I was sharing my impression of all his activities. I was eager to know whether I had changed him or not. So that means that it depends on the individual. I will tell you a very interesting story. Once I was traveling by train, from Mumbai to Calcutta, and the train stopped at Nagpur. There was some problem in the distant signal and the train was detained. Now, I was just on the platform, moving here and there, because it was uncomfortable in the compartment, I felt that I should better walk on the platform.

All of a sudden a respectable lady was coming towards me. I was thinking I shall move aside, but she was coming to me and then all of a sudden she touched my feet. "Sir, how are you? I think you are well."

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** "I think you don't recognize me. Sir, I was your postgraduate student in Calcutta. I was in your first batch of students."

I said, "Oh, that time you were young and now you are a middle-aged lady. That's why I couldn't recognize you."

"No, no, Sir. How can we forget you? I'm from your first batch of students."

**HpSwami:** Another time I remember, you were describing that you took a large group of students to South India and then there was a hurricane or something that happened.

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Oh yes. That is another exciting experience. We were there on an educational tour with Indian and foreign students, and then all of a sudden, when we were in Madurai, there was a huge cyclone. We were in a guesthouse that had not been affected. But then, people here in Calcutta thought that I and my students from Calcutta who were with me, were all gone, that we were finished, because so many people died. Luckily, we survived. On the first train to leave Madurai, I was thinking how to go, because at that time, this mobile phone was not there, and we were not having any interaction with any members at home.

Then in the first train to leave Madurai, we were all packed in the compartment. We were 29 students. So, it was a horrible experience. But we were leaving. And everybody felt, "When I will come back?"



Professor Vishnukant Sastri, Governor of Uttar Pradesh, is honouring Professor Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay for successfully editing with Dr. T. D. Singh (Berkely, U.S.A.) the volume *Thoughts on Synthesis of Science and Religion* at a Reception-Function on 20.01.2002 jointly organized by the Asiatic Society (Kolkata) and the Organizing Committee of the 2nd World Congress for the Synthesis of Science and Religion. Dr. T. D. Singh (alias B. S. Damodaraswami) is seen at the middle

**HpSwami:** You also told me that when the train was pulling out, there were even bodies of people who drowned. You said there were people hanging out of windows or something, people who had drowned.

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:**

Yes, I was just going to mention, when the train was moving, you could find several station buildings that were damaged, destroyed. In one particular place, we found another 2 people half inside and half outside the building.

And they were looking, and only their eyes could be seen. It was terrifying, in fact.

**HpSwami:** Wow! One thing that we're discussing today was that when you come to the doctoral level, that's the first time, you're actually assigned an individual assessor, mentor.

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Yes, a supervisor. After getting any bachelor's degree, students get allocated one supervisor. So they are doing their own work, according to the instructions of the teacher, and a personal relationship develops. That is true. I have my students, and even in your country. I spoke to you about that. Richard Salomon was doing postgraduate studies with me

at that time, specialized classes, a small group. We had close interaction and sometimes they used to ask questions that would touch the heart.

**HpSwami:** Is he the one who was the professor at the University of Washington, Seattle?

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Yes, yes. Richard Salomon.

**HpSwami:** Yes. I remember we were with you and Prof. Dina Bandhu Pandey in the ISKCON guest house in Vrindavan when we met Prof. Salomon's student.

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Yes, he is very well known because of his contribution to early Indian paleography.

**HpSwami:** We were there with Dina Bandhu Pandey in the guest house in Vrindavan and I had one disciple coming for initiation. Professor Pandey suggested the initiation name Ekashma. So we asked, "Well, what does that mean?" "Oh, it is a name for Salagram Sila." I looked at you and you nodded. Then Prof. Pandey, yourself and I were at the front gate of the guest house in Vrindavan with Ekashma. Then one of his friends, Mukunda Datta, who actually recommended me to Ekashma as guru from ISKCON, came up and I introduced you. Mukunda Datta said that he studied at the University of Washington for his doctorate. You said, "Oh, Professor Salomon was one of my students." And Mukunda Datta said, "Oh, my goodness! He was my professor. You're my param guru!" Nice comment. It's interesting, we went for the initiation at somebody's house, ISKCON Brahmin house, very nice. I gave him the name of Ekashma and he said, "What does the name mean?" I said, "Salagram Sila." And Ekashma was shocked and said, "My goodness! On the way here with three or four more ISKCON devotees, we saw one devotee lady in the airport, and she had a very heavy carry-on bag that was hard for her to carry. "So, I ask her if I could help and she said, 'Yes, yes.' I asked, 'What's in the bag?' She said, 'Salagram Silas.' And after 4 days, I get the name Salagram Sila Das!"

So, Ravi, who was your supervisor?

**Prof. Ravi Gupta:** Dr. Sanjukta Gupta Gombrich.

**HpSwami:** But you already had other very prominent people advising you, no? They were like your Siksha Acaryas, guiding you through your doctorate?

**Prof. Ravi Gupta:** Yes, Professor M. Narasimhachary, who was Head of the Department of Vaishnavism at the University of Madras, and a visiting professor of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies. Also Professor Joseph O'Connell, who was professor of Gaudiya Vaishnava studies at the University of Toronto. Prof. Bandyopadhyay, are you acquainted with either one of these scholars?



**Dr. Samares Bandyopadhyay:** Oh, please just mention the name once again.

**Prof. Ravi Gupta:** Prof. Narasimhachary.

**Dr. Samares Bandyopadhyay:** Oh, yes, yes, yes. I know. I met him, I have listened to him at different conferences, and when I was invited to deliver a lecture at Madras University. He came and met me, long back. I still remember him.

**Prof. Ravi Gupta:** So the relationship you were describing of preceptor and student, that was very much the case in my own life. In my experience with Prof Narasimhachary, when he came to Oxford University three times as a visiting professor there, sometimes for one term, sometimes for longer. And he was such a storehouse of knowledge, of Vaishnava literature, Sanskrit literature. He had received the title of Asu-kavi-sekhara, the crest jewel of poets who could compose Sanskrit poetry on the spot. And he taught me so much, not just about academic knowledge, but also the culture of Sanskrit learning. I remember that so much of what I've learned from him was outside of the formal classes. The relationship you are describing where he would say, "Ravi, can you come to my apartment and help me with one thing? I need help with how to start the heating in the house." So I would walk over to his place and help him and show him how to turn on the heat and all of that. And in the process, he would tell me some beautiful Sanskrit sloka and explain its meaning or tell me some joke in Sanskrit. And I learned so much from this personal relationship, not just through the formal structure of the university. For me that really embodied the heart of the preceptor student relationship. It's not just about, "Oh! You taught me in the class, you gave me an A or B or C, the grade." It's about a lifelong relationship. Eventually he came to my wedding as well, gave his blessings there. He composed and recited a series of slokas to offer blessings on the occasion. So it became something very, very wonderful.

**Dr. Samares Bandyopadhyay:** He was a great scholar, and not only that. He studied the cultural aspects very significantly. Interestingly, I noticed in my experiences, that all of a sudden, I would meet a student and the student would remember certain incidents from postgraduate classes at the University of Calcutta. Now, the teacher forgets such incidents, but the student remembers. These traditions carry through generation after generation.

I was invited to speak on Swami Vivekananda at a seminar in Australia in 2014 with participants from 151 countries. A student from 50 years ago approached me suddenly. He was not an invited speaker in the conference but he heard that I was speaking, so he came to meet me. He was encouraging me that I should live longer and longer. It made me laugh. It really touched me.

**HpSwami:** We've already been talking for some time. I don't want to exhaust you. Next Tuesday is my Vyasa Puja. We are having some festival.

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Oh. I wish I could participate.

**HpSwami:** Thank you. Maybe we would like to talk to you then, but I don't know. What I would like to know also are your experiences, which professors and which teachers were formative in your life, your development. At the university, I think many times you told me about one of your principal mentors, he was head of the Department of History. Who were your mentors for your doctorate and development?

And at the University of Calcutta, your bachelor's degree was in which area?

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** So Maharaja, your Guruji is T. D. Singh, you introduced him to me, and then later on one day he gave me a call when he was in Calcutta. He told me, "I'm coming to your house." It was 10:30am. "I have lots of questions for you about Indian culture. I want to discuss." Then from 10:30 am to 6:30 in the evening, he was here. Sharing a little prasadam of Salagram Sila in my house and we were discussing many topics. He mentioned that here and there, wherever he goes, he noticed that postgraduate students, university students, carry the impressions of their teachers in their minds and hearts. I had my law students, I used to teach law in the University, and I had students who were senior to me by age. There were many, because they were from different professions before starting their bachelor's degree in Law.

Even if he is younger, a teacher's life is meaningful. It becomes meaningful when he shares these things with somebody else.

**HpSwami:** When you were in University of Calcutta and working for your doctorate who was the head of the department at that time? He was a very, very famous Indian historian.

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Oh, yes, Professor Dr. D. C. Sarkar. He was my supervisor.

**HpSwami:** So he was actually your supervisor for your studies?

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Yes, actually in postgraduate classes I met him. He was 60 years old at the time and ready to retire. I received a scholarship to go and study abroad, but I declined when I learned that Professor Sarkar would be at the University of Calcutta. There was no one of his caliber and knowledge. Professor A. L. Basham, a world famous Indologist, wrote *The Wonder that Was India*. He was a professor at Oxford and many, many distinguished scholars were his students and working at universities around the world. Professor Basham said that your teacher, D. C. Sarkar, is a better scholar and educationist than me.

**HpSwami:** You had to submit your thesis one time and you said he didn't even look at it. He just signed it and told you to submit it.



(Left to Right) Hanumaptresaka Swami, Professor Ravi Gupta and Doctor Kenneth R. Valpey in front of the Vaikuntha Perumal Temple in South India.

**Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay:** Oh, oh, oh yes. I remember (laughs). Yes. I think it was great.

(Editor's note: At this point in the conversation, Professor Samaresh tells some very interesting experiences and is forced to become very emotional during his explanations. So an exact transcript is not possible and we will summarize the story here.)

Professor Samaresh describes how many times there were very poor boys from rural Bengali atmosphere who came to the University of Calcutta. In one case, he was so bold as to approach Professor Sarkar and point that one boy was very sincere and had very good character and very much needed some help. Dr. Sarkar said, "It's very bold of you to approach me like this, but I take your opinion seriously. So I will do what I can do to get a grant for him. This was accomplished, and the student went on to become a very respected and productive scholar. Professor Bandyopadhyay further comments that even a few days before he was talking to Mrs. Bandyopadhyay remembering one boy who was so poor that he could not even purchase proper shoes for the rainy weather. He asked the boy, "Why aren't dressing properly? Is it some religious austerity?" And the boy replied, "No sir, I simply do not have the money to get the shoes." This touched Prof. Samaresh so intensely that he began crying and obtained a pair of shoes for the boy and he also continued with his studies successfully.

In the felicitations volume that NIOS produced out of respect for Dr. Samaresh Bandyopadhyay, one of his colleagues remembers that he also was a poor lower-class boy coming from the village, but somehow or the other was admitted to the University of Calcutta. So, when he came amongst the students who were all from educated and cultured families, and well dressed, he felt very intimidated. But Dr. Bandyopadhyay, as one of the senior boys, immediately received him politely and made him feel very comfortable and continued to be his friend and guide after that.

(Editor's note: After this, we terminated the conversation with plans to meet and talk again. We explained the progress of the symposia, our movie, and NIOS' magazine, *Solaris*. We explained that we hoped to arrive in Calcutta in September with many friends from South America. Professor commented that they would be very cordially received and he would be looking forward toward the event.).

