

- Two swans are depicted on the left side of the goddess. A swan is said to have a sensitive beak that enables it to distinguish pure milk from a mixture of milk and water. A swan, therefore, symbolizes the power of discrimination, or the ability to discriminate between right and wrong or good and bad. Saraswati uses the swan as her vehicle. This indicates that one must acquire and apply knowledge with discrimination for the good of mankind. Knowledge that is dominated by ego can destroy the world.
- A peacock is sitting next to Saraswati and is anxiously waiting to serve as her vehicle. A peacock depicts unpredictable behavior as its moods can be influenced by the changes in the weather. Saraswati is using a swan as a vehicle and not the peacock. This signifies that one should overcome fear, indecision, and fickleness in order to acquire true knowledge.

Next Lesson: **Vishnu - The Preserver**

Review Questions:

Answer the following questions in your notebook.

1. Why do most of the Hindu gods seem to have little less power than their female consorts? Is it the religion or culture?
2. Since Saraswati is the daughter of Shiva and Durga, therefore Shiva becomes the father-in-law of Brahma. What does this say about the status and importance of Brahma in the Hindu trinity?
3. According to the legend, Saraswati carried Shiva's flame to the sea knowing that the flame will not harm her. Today the river no longer exists. Does this question the divinity, authority, power, etc. of Saraswati?
4. Why do educated people worship Saraswati? Is moksha or salvation limited to scholars only? Is there still hope for the unlearned?
5. Why do all Hindu deities sit on the lotus? What symbolisms are there in the lotus?
6. Explain the symbolisms for the following:
Four Arms, Rosary, Veena, White Saree, Swans, Peacock

Lesson 5 Saraswati Consort of Brahma



Saraswati seated on the swan

Saraswati is regarded as the goddess of knowledge and the arts. Saraswati represents consciousness and wisdom. Saraswati is also regarded as **Vaagdevi**, the goddess of sound and speech. Saraswati is revered as the dispeller of chaos and confusion.

She is the mother of the Vedas, and chants to her, called the **Saraswati Vandana** often begin and end Vedic lessons. Saraswati is the daughter of god Shiva and goddess Durga. It is believed that goddess Saraswati endows human beings with the powers of speech, wisdom and learning.

Saraswati is worshipped as the consort of **Brahma** the creator. Legend has it that Brahma the creator acquired the power to think and create only through the power of Saraswati and that it was Saraswati that enabled Brahma to listen to the **naadabrahmam** the primordial sound (AUM or OM) which is revered as the source of all creation.

Saraswati's birthday - Vasant Panchami - is a Hindu festival celebrated every year on the 5th day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of **Magha**. Hindus celebrate this festival with great fervor in temples, homes and educational institutes alike.

The learned and the scholars attach greater importance to the worship of goddess Saraswati. As a practice, only educated people worship her for knowledge and wisdom. They believe that only Saraswati can grant them **moksha** - the final liberation of the soul.

The now extinct river **Saraswati**, once an integral part of Vedic culture is associated with Saraswati the goddess of knowledge. Legend has it that when Shiva opened his third eye, the flame that came out threatened to destroy everything in its path. Only Saraswati the source of wisdom was untroubled by the power of the flame, owing to her firm understanding that the flame would only destroy what was impure. She then took the form of a **river**, carried the flame deep into the sea and transformed it into a fire breathing mare and declared that the creature of destruction would stay underground as long as wisdom was sought after and that it would surface if this search was totally abandoned.

Shrines dedicated to Saraswati are commonly seen in many Shivite temples all over south India, located to the right of Parvati's shrine.

There is a single temple dedicated to **Saraswati** near Thanjavur in Tamilnadu.

Characteristics

Saraswati is depicted as clothed in white, seated on a white lotus playing the instrument veena (sitar). The four vedas are considered to be her offsprings. Her vehicle, the swans said to personify pure knowledge. Any institution of learning is regarded as Saraswati's temple. Musical instruments are also regarded as symbols of Saraswati. Saraswati is said to be the giver of knowledge that drives out ignorance and unhappiness.

Symbolisms in Saraswati

- The lotus is a symbol of the supreme reality, and a white lotus also denotes supreme knowledge. By sitting on a lotus, Saraswati signifies that she is herself rooted in the Supreme Reality, and symbolizes supreme knowledge. The white color symbolizes purity and knowledge. The white sari that the goddess is wearing denotes that she is the embodiment of pure knowledge.
- The four arms denote her omnipresence and omnipotence. The two front arms indicate her activity in the physical world and the two back arms signify her presence in the spiritual world. The four hands represent the four elements of the inner personality. The **mind** (manas) is represented by the front right hand, the **intellect** (buddhi) by the front left hand, the conditioned **consciousness** (chitta) by the rear left hand, and the **ego** (ahankara) by the rear right hand.
- The left side of the body symbolizes the qualities of the heart and the right side symbolizes activities of the mind and intellect. A book in the rear left hand signifies that knowledge acquired must be used with love and kindness to promote prosperity of mankind.
- The rosary signifies concentration, meditation, and contemplation, leading to **samadhi**, or union with God. A rosary in the rear right hand representing ego conveys that true knowledge acquired with love and devotion melts the ego and results in liberation (moksha) of the seeker from the bondage to the physical world.
- The goddess is shown playing a musical instrument that is held in her front hands, which denote mind and intellect. This symbol conveys that the seeker must tune his mind and intellect in order to live in perfect harmony with the world. Such harmonious living enables the individual to utilize acquired knowledge for the welfare of all mankind.