

Vedic Way of Understanding Sarasvatee

Sanjay Mohan Mittal

Based on the discourses of Aachaarya Saanand ji

Almost all Hindus revere Goddess Sarasvatee and worship her in different ways. All over the world, educational institutions, temples and homes, are laden with Sarasvatee's statues and images. In the images and statues we invariably see a lady sitting on a swan holding a voluminous string instrument in her hands. Imagine the fate of a bird that weighs around 20 pounds and has to carry a lady weighing 150 pounds on its back. To add to that, the lady is holding in her hands, a musical instrument weighing another 20 pounds. What would be the plight of this poor swan? Would it not get crushed under this weight which is eight to ten times of its own weight?

The devotees mostly ignite lamps, burn incense sticks in front of these statues; and then offer flowers, fruits, sweets etc. Various stories are recited during discourses describing how Sarasvatee can miraculously grant someone wisdom. Is this the correct way of worshipping Sarasvatee? Has anyone become wise just by offering lamps, sweets etc. to her imagery, while completely ignoring the studies? Has the lady in the image ever spoken any words of wisdom to anybody? Or is there a deeper meaning to various symbols and features displayed in Sarasvatee's statue?

Let's try to find answers to these intriguing questions. In order to do that, let's first look at the meaning of word Sarasvatee itself. In the Vedas the word Sarasvatee has two meanings and contexts, knowledge and speech. Knowledge gives us the rubric to live our life by. It enables us to make intelligent decisions on our behaviors, the way we conduct our business, and on every action we undertake. Speech enables our interaction with others. Our intellect enables us to choose the words, and the timing and manner of the utterance of these words. Our speech when used properly creates friends for us and creates enemies when used improperly.

In order to attain the knowledge and wisdom that can help us in our lives, we first need to understand the deeper symbolism hidden in the various features displayed on Sarasvatee's statue. Only after understanding these messages, we can use them to improve our lives. The various noticeable features are:

1. Goddess is sitting on a Swan.

The swan has always been portrayed as a creature possessing discriminating intellect. Swan is metaphorically given two attributes. First, metaphor is that, a swan can separate milk from the water. When presented with a mixture of milk and water, the swan can drink milk out of the mixture and leave the water behind. Second, metaphor is that a swan can pick the pearls from the ocean. Both of these represent an acute sense of judgement for the quality. A swan has the intellectual capacity that enables it to pick the best.

The swan in the picture represents the student, i.e. all of us who are trying to attain the Vedic knowledge and wisdom. All of us strive to possess a discriminating intellect similar to that of a swan. All of us want to acquire judgement that enables us to differentiate between what is righteous



Vedic Way of Understanding Sarasvatee

and virtuous and what is not. All of want to be able to pick the right thoughts, habits, dispositions and actions. Let all of us find ways to become one like a swan.

2. A lady depicting Goddess Sarasvatee

The lady in this image represents the knowledge itself. When the swan comes in contact with the knowledge, it becomes wise. When it is humbled by the weight of knowledge and achieves the mental fortitude to bear this knowledge, it develops a discriminating intellect. Without the knowledge a swan is just an ordinary bird, with nothing distinguishing it from other birds except its beauty. Only the company of this scholarly lady has enabled the swan to be talked about differently.

We can also acquire a similar sense of judgement only when our lives are touched by the divine knowledge taught to us by scholarly gurus. We, the seekers of knowledge should also be constantly looking for the company of righteous and noble scholars. This tendency will make us a seeker who is consistently looking for ways of self improvement.

3. Vedas in one hand of the lady

Only Vedas contain the divine knowledge that God himself, at the beginning of the creation, revealed to the sages. Most of us equate the Sanskrit root word *vid* to knowledge. However, this word has a deeper meaning. It means wit or keen intelligence. The Vedas in the hands of the lady represents the kind of knowledge that would enable us to have a discriminating intellect similar to a swan. It can indeed only be the Vedic knowledge. Any knowledge that contradicts the Vedas is called *avidyaa* i.e. ignorance. We thus have to be very careful in choosing the scholars and gurus we learn from. We should choose only the one who have mastered the four Vedas and are willing to teach the same.

4. String instrument veenaa in her hands

Veenaa in her hands represents the sweetness of the sound. When we learn the Vedas properly, our voices develop the sweetness which is the virtue of the Vedas. After becoming scholars of the Vedas, we shall only speak truth in a pleasing manner. The words uttered from our mouth would sound sweet to the ears of the listener, as sweet as the sound of the veenaa.

Now besides admiring the knowledge contained in the Vedas, we can also admire the intelligence of the original designer(s) of this statue. By building deep symbolism into this image they have provided us with a reminder to consistently seek knowledge. The statues of Sarasvatee need to be there everywhere in order to constantly remind us of these symbols.

Our efforts towards seeking knowledge are our true tribute and worship to Sarasvatee. Our current ways of worshiping her by offering lamps, fruits, sweets etc. are mere hypocrisies and contribute nothing towards our spiritual or intellectual upliftment. On the contrary these hypocrisies propel us in the abyss of ignorance.

It is up to us to truly worship Sarasvatee by consistently seeking Vedic knowledge.