



Greatness of  
Hamsa

Swan a symbol of *Viveka* and Prudence

**S**wan (*hamsa*), is a bird of elegance, beauty and purity. She is compared to a saintly person who is unattached to worldly desires, just as her feathers do not get wet although she is in water. It is commonly known that the swan separates water from milk. Though this is only a poetic expression, it symbolises *Viveka*, i.e., prudence and discrimination between the good and the bad or between the eternal and the transient.

The Goddess of Knowledge, Sarasvati, is seen seated on the swan. She is referred to as *Hamsa vahini*, which means "she who has a *Hamsa* as her vehicle". The bird, symbolises *Sattva Guna* or purity *par excellence*.

## Swan, an integral part of Spiritual World

Swan is revered in Hinduism; what is it that makes this bird such an intrinsic part of the spiritual world?

"It is the only bird that flies very high; it flies even beyond the Himalayas; it is the symbol of the highest level of flight; higher level is naturally affiliated to spirituality," says scholar Shatavadhani Ganesh.

Spiritually, this bird's flawless white colour depicts purity and pristine beauty. The *hamsa* as cited in the *Rg Veda* is a sunbird who flies through Mount Kailasa to reside in the Mana Sarovar. In the *Bhagavata Purana* one of the *avatars* of Vishnu is *hamsa*.

There are four paths towards spiritual enhancement, explains Shatavadhani Ganesh. The *pipilika marga*, pace of spiritual journey similar to an ant, *Suka marga*, flying like a parrot; *Garuda marga*, flying higher than *Suka marga*, and *Hamsa marga* which is the highest in this spiritual journey. A *sadhaka* who goes beyond all these becomes a *Paramahamsa*, literally meaning Supreme Swan that symbolises spiritual discrimination.

Many religious institutions have adopted the swan on their emblem, prominent among them being the revered Sringeri Sharada Peetham and Ramakrishna Mutt.

## Sringeri Tradition

Guru Adi Sankaracharya in his *Soundarya Lahari* extols the qualities of the swan, highlighting the concept of partnership on a divine plane. *Slokas* 38 and 91 depict a pair of



## Hamsa in Sringeri Tradition

**H**amsa has been holding a prominent

position in our *Sastras* from very old times. It is important for man to know its significance. *Hamsa* cleverly absorbs milk alone from a mixture of milk and water.

This is its greatness. In a similar manner, a *paramahamsa jnani* separates the superimposed false *jagat* from real *Brahman* and immerses himself in the real.

*Jnanis* alone are capable of doing this....like perceiving the real rope by negating the superimposed snake. It is because of this ability that *hamsa* symbolises a *paramahamsa jnani*.

As all the *Jagadgurus* adorning Sringeri Sharada Peetham over long periods have been great *Brahma Jnanis* traditionally, the *hamsa* symbol is attributed to the *Peetham*.

Another point: The *hamsa* symbol has a message for one who exhibits eagerness to know all the *Sastras* fully well.

The *Sastras* to be comprehended are numerous.

As the time at one's disposal is short and hurdles are many, one's life itself may end before learning all the *Sastras*.

That is why our ancestors had advised the *jijnasus* to know, through the guru, what is important and practise it. That is, just as the *hamsa* sucks the milk alone, leaving aside the water, the *jijnasu* should absorb the essence of the *sastras* and leave out the rest **H**

अनन्तशास्त्रं  
बहुवेदितव्यमल्पश्च  
कालो बहवश्चविघ्नाः ।  
यत्सारभूतं तदुपासितव्यं  
हंसो यथा  
क्षीरमिवाम्बुमिश्रम् ॥

