After a sleepless night spent longing for his absent wife Sītā, Rāma, god-prince and future king, surveyed his army camps on a clear autumn morning and spied a white goose playing in a pond of lotus flowers. Seeing this radiant creature who so resembled his lost beloved, he began to plead with the bird to give her a message of love and fierce revenge.

This is the setting of the Hamsasandeśa ("A Message for the Goose"), a sandeśa or “messenger poem” by the medieval saint-poet and philosopher Veṅkaṭanātha, a seminal figure for the Śrīvaīsaṭṭava religious community of Tamil Nadu, South India, and a master poet in Sanskrit and Tamil. In The Flight of Love, Steven P. Hopkins situates Veṅkaṭanātha’s Sanskrit sandeśa within the wider comparative context of South Indian and Sri Lankan literatures. He traces the significance of messenger poetry in the construction of sacred landscapes in pre-modern South Asia and explores the ways the Hamsasandeśa re-visions the pan-Indian story of Rāma and Sītā, rooting its protagonists in a turbulent emotional world where separation, overwhelming desire, and anticipated bliss, are written into the living particularized bodies of lover and beloved, in the “messenger” goose and in the landscapes surrounding them.

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**Steven P. Hopkins** is Professor of Religion and Coordinator of Asian Studies at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedāntadesīka in Their South Indian Tradition and An Ornament for Jewels: Love Poems for the Lord of Gods by Vedāntadesīka, which was awarded the 2010 South Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies A.K. Ramanujan Book Prize for Translation.

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